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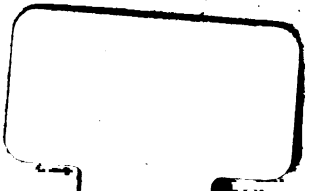

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THE

PEASANT

OF

ARDENNE FOREST:

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

By Mrs. PARSONS,

AUTHOR OF

ANECDOTES OF TWO WELL-KNOWN FAMILIES
THE MISER, THE VALLEY OF ST. GOTHARD,
AN OLD FRIEND WITH A NEW FACE,
WOMAN AS SHE SHOULD BE,
MYSTERIOUS WARNING, &c.

"Hereditary honour in worldly estimation is accounted the most noble; but reason and sound judgment speaketh in favour of him who hath acquired distinction by his *merit*; for 'tis *virtue*, and not *birth*, which maketh men truly noble:—And poor is his boast, who is compelled to *borrow* his claims to respect from a long list of titled ancestors."

VOL. I.

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1801.

THE PEASANT OF ARDENNE FOREST.

CHAP. I.

IN the spacious forest of Ardenne, which in the time of the Romans had extended far into Germany, but at this period was chiefly confined between Thionville, in Luxemburgh, and the city of Liege, a few scattered huts of wood-cutters, the Abbey of St. Hubert, an old monastery buried in the wood, and at some distance, the ruins of a once stately Castle, were all the re-

mains of habitable places that could afford shelter to the unfortunate wanderer, or the benighted traveller.

In one of those huts resided a very ancient couple, whose existence had been prolonged by the duteous attention, and unremitting industry of a young grandson, about nineteen years of age, and who had unhappily lost both his parents before six summers had rolled over his head.

Sensible that to his worthy grandsire he was indebted for health, strength, and the purest, tho' simplest lessons of morality, it became to this good youth the source of all his pleasures, the gratification of his first wish, that heaven endued him with powers to work for the support of helpless, declining age.

A very tempestuous day, followed by a violent storm for several hours during the night,

night, in the month of September, had threatened their little dwelling with entire destruction; but as the humble shrub escapes, whilst the lofty oak is torn from the roots, so did the feeble covering of these poor foresters remain unhurt, whilst the fury of the wind levelled to the earth many of the towering pines that over-shadowed the forest.

When the turbulence of the storm had subsided, and at the first dawn of the morning, young Lewis quitted his bed; eager to pursue his daily occupation, and no less anxious to view the effects of the terrible hurricane that had impressed terror on the inhabitants of the humble cot.

"The Abbey and Convent," said he, "ingulphed as they are in the bosom of a thick wood, have little to fear from the violence of the tempest; and the tall trees surrounding them could scarcely extend

to the buildings, if they have not escaped being torn up.—But I fear the remaining part of the old Castle is entirely demolished; its battlements are doubtless thrown down, and I shall no longer enjoy the extensive prospects that I have been accustomed to view with equal delight and wonder!—Ah! how much I shall regret the fall of those lofty towers that have been long trembling on their mouldering bases."

"You may deplore its ruined grandeur, my son," replied his aged sire, "because timely repairs and hospitable inmates might have preserved it from a premature decay. But such is the instability of all sublunary edifices raised to the gratification of vanity and pride;—long since the owners of that superb mansion were crumbled into dust, and the heirs, if any such remain, have resigned it to the depredations of time, and the destructive hands of the lawless banditti,

banditti, who have for years concealed themselves in its ruins."

"Well," returned Lewis, "as the tempest hath torn up so many trees, some hours of labour are saved, and I shall therefore spare a little time to walk over to the castle."

He hastily partook of a breakfast with his aged parents;—after which, accompanied with their blessings, he flew through the forest towards the spot from whence he had drawn many happy hours, and where he had indulged many extravagant and romantic ideas, relative to a world he had never yet seen.

Great was his surprise when he beheld at a distance the turrets of the castle peeping over the trees, and as he advanced nearer, perceived the battlements unhurt; they having escaped the fury of the storm, by

its taking a partial direction, which had spared the rocking towers, and fallen on objects of greater magnitude.

Young Lewis was transported to find his favorite haunt in a state so different from what he expected, and hastily ascended up the stairs of the west tower that overlooked the forest, and afforded a distant view of the river Moselle.

The sun had just emerged from behind the mountains,—the air was calm,—all nature seemed to enjoy the soft serenity of the morning, and his bosom in unison with the peaceful scene;—he offered up his orisons to Heaven with grateful rapture for the safety of his aged parents and their humble cottage;—nor was he less thankful that the old castle still remained as a source of pleasure, when he relaxed from his daily labour.

He

He had stood some time wrapped in contemplating the beautiful surrounding scenery, when suddenly he beheld a young female come from behind the thickest of the trees with a large bundle of wood, and apparently enter the south end of the castle, where stood the ruins of a chapel, and with the whole of that wing, was in a state of greater decay than any other part; such indeed as had deterred him from venturing to examine it, particularly as its situation, looking only towards a thick wood, offered no gratification to curiosity.

Extremely surprised, he descended the stairs, and, insensible to the dangers he had heretofore apprehended, crept softly towards the ruined chapel; and as he halted at the entrance heard a feeble voice utter some inarticulate sounds, which were answered in tones so sweet and mournful that they pierced through the heart of Lewis,

and gave him new and undescribable emotions.

"Cease, my dear father, thus to reproach yourself, or wound my bosom, by the supposition that I can possibly feel pain in performing such duties as are not less voluntary than necessary. I beseech you, dear Sir, to spare yourself and me; you will get better in a day or two—pray take comfort: — Heaven is most merciful, — repentance for error cannot prove unavailing, and the sainted object of your regrets is for ever happy!"

Such were the words uttered by a female voice, and which appeared to produce only a return of heavy sighs from the person they were addressed to.

Lewis stopped a few moments, irresolute whether he should descend the stairs that went into the chapel, or in what manner to apologize

apologize for his intrusion; for he felt an irresistible impulse to view the young person, with whose voice and language he was quite captivated.

Whilst he stood hesitating on the edge of the stair, it suddenly gave way, crumbled under him, and he fell with some violence against the decayed door; which, unable to support the shock burst from its hinges and fell into the chapel.

The noise this occasioned, with the sudden surprise and the screams of the young woman, were altogether so instantaneous, that though Lewis was very little hurt, he lay for some moments without moving, until the invalid feebly advanced and demanded what had brought him there?—Roused by the question, and recovering from the blow, he got up, stammering out an apology; but before he had finished he threw his eyes on the trembling terrified

female, and stopped short, his looks intently fixed on her, without being sensible that his ardent gaze was by no means calculated to remove her terror.

Her father, not less hurt, again reiterated his question,—"What brought you here, —who is it you want, young man?"

"Forgive me, Sir," replied Lewis, "this intrusion was solely the effect of accident; I had no design rudely to force myself into your presence, and though I acknowledge that curiosity brought me to the stairs that lead to this chapel, yet I was impelled by no sinister views to break in upon your retirement.—By chance I saw that young woman enter this part of the castle, and a sudden impulse of surprise and curiosity guided me to discover her retreat;—the stair broke under me, and I am very much concerned that my imprudence should have occasioned this fright and disturbance."

Whilst

Whilst Lewis was speaking, the father and his daughter had rivetted their eyes upon him, with equal surprise and admiration. Nature had been most truly bountiful to him in her gifts, which were not simply confined to his person, for she had enriched his mind with a good understanding, a retentive memory, a genius that soared above the humble state of his birth and fortunes,—and with a heart, where honour, integrity, and every social virtue glowed with as much ardour as if he had been born a prince, and inherited nobility of sentiment from a long list of noble ancestors.

The strangers were astonished to see a fine figure, an engaging open countenance, a graceful manner, and a style of speaking that would not have disgraced a courtier, clothed in a peasant's habit, and with a wood-cutter's implements, denoting the nature of his employment.

Surprise

Surprise rather of a pleasing kind superceded terror; the invalid gentleman staggered back to his seat, by the assistance of his daughter's arm, when, pointing to a niche near him, said, "Sit down, young man, I confess your sudden appearance greatly alarmed me, but your countenance and address are calculated to inspire pleasure and confidence rather than fear or suspicion.—Your language and habit do not any ways accord, and possibly you are not what you seem to be."

"I am the son of poor parents, Sir, long since deceased," replied Lewis, "and I have many years supported *their* aged parents, by my daily labour;—I am, therefore, simply what I appear to be, a wood-cutter in the Forest of Ardenne."

"You encrease my wonder," returned the gentleman, "by what means have you acquired the good sense and politeness so incompatible

incompatible with your birth and situation?" "I do not comprehend your question, Sir,—mine is the language of nature,—I know nothing of politeness but the word,—to speak truth on all occasions is the principal lesson that I have been taught."

"And the noblest lesson that you can adhere to," answered the stranger, with great emotion, "it is the foundation of every moral virtue;—if the heart was always permitted to guide the lips, mankind would cease to be false and deceptive, suspicious and sceptical.—Happy youth! you are a stranger to the world; would to Heaven that I had been born an inhabitant of this forest, and possessed of innocence and intuitive knowledge like you."

"Ah, Sir, but if you had grown old and helpless here, without a son to work for you, what a wretched situation would have been

been your's!—Surely those who are in affluence ought to be happier, because they have not poverty to fear in the decrepitude of age."

"You are mistaken in your conclusion, tho' your observation and inference appears just, I cannot——" Here a sudden faintness overspread his almost exhausted frame, and but for the quick support of Lewis he would have fallen on the pavement.

The young girl threw herself on her knees, embracing him in agonies beyond description;—she clasped her hands, "My father!—Oh! my father!" those were the only words she could utter, her bosom throbbed with anguish, her eyes wild and distracted:—Oh, how exquisitely painful must have been her feelings, when the repetition of "Oh! my father!" were the only sounds she had strength to bring forth;

forth; without even the power to move from her heart-rending attitude, or afford the object of her sorrow the smallest relief.

Happily Lewis, who had been accustomed to help and support his aged relatives, had sufficient presence of mind to administer proper assistance to the unfortunate stranger; and in a short time he recovered his senses, to the inexpressible joy of his almost distracted child.

When he was somewhat recovered, he thanked the young forester for his kindness:—"A sudden recollection of sorrowful events," said he, "overpowered my strength;—I have been exhausted by travelling, and I believe the surprise occasioned by your fall agitated my weak frame."

"I am unfortunate indeed," cried Lewis, hurt by these words, "that by an unwarrantable

rantable curiosity I should have been the cause of increasing your disorder, and shall never forgive myself for what I have seen this lady suffer."

"You are no ways to blame," returned the gentleman, "your proceeding was extremely natural and pardonable at your age." "At least," said Lewis, "I can protest, no improper motives gave rise to the impulse that brought me here; but I shall ever deplore it, if this lady does not pardon me, and if you refuse to admit of my services towards the restoration of your health."

"Alas!" replied he, "the latter is beyond your kindness, or skill, to accomplish; the feeble body is sinking fast under the mind's disease."—"But, Sir, you should not indulge that disease, for I have been taught that despondency and grief leads to despair and impiety."

"No,

"No, I trust, to neither;—but it will lead me to my grave, where only I can know peace." "Surely, Sir, that calamity must be of an uncommon nature whose cure can be found only in the grave."

"Such, my good young man, is that which hourly consumes me,—aggravated by the misery of leaving my child, at this period, young, unprotected, and unfortunate, to all the evils that are attendant on her sex, innocence, and a mind unhacknied in the ways of the world. Gracious Father to the fatherless!" cried he with energy, lifting his clasped hands to Heaven, "bless and protect this unhappy orphan;—preserve to her, *peace* and *innocence*;—for the rest, 'eye her, blest Providence, and square her trials to her proportioned strength!'"

Lewis,

Lewis, deeply affected, threw his eyes alternately on the father and his suffering child, for some moments incapable of speaking;—a gush of tears from the latter, as she pressed the emaciated hand of her parent, restored him to speech.—"Let me entreat you, Sir, to accept of my services to convey you to the humble dwelling of my grandfather;—tho' they are not capable of affording you active assistance, my aged parents will sooth your sorrows,—will hold out lessons of comfort,—and teach you to bear those griefs that oppress you, without sinking under them through a repining impatient spirit."

"I thank you," returned the stranger, "for your kind offers, but which, were I inclined to accept, I have not strength to profit by;—a weakness, hourly encreasing, impedes every possibility of being removed from hence.—But I adore the goodness of Heaven that conducted you to this spot,

as

as you may essentially serve my child, and give relief to the agonized bosom that throbs now solely for her."

"Tell me, Sir," exclaimed Lewis, "teach me in what way I can be so happy as to be instrumental to your peace." The energy of his voice raised the drooping head of the stranger to view him with encreased wonder:—"Whilst delighted with your humanity," said he, "I am astonished at your language; you *can not be* the son of a peasant,—no, 'tis impossible,—you surely are not the son of a low-born forester!"

"And why not?" returned Lewis, "does poverty of birth prevent a man from feeling compassion—from following the dictates of humanity?—Has our Almighty Creator given to the rich alone, just and tender feelings?—Doth *he* deny to the poor the knowledge of good and evil, and the

the duties imposed by conscience and humanity?" "Surely not," answered the gentleman, "but the manner—the language of persons lowly born, and bred in obscurity, distinguishes them from others who have the advantages of high birth and good education."

"No doubt, Sir," returned Lewis, modestly, "and I know nothing of these advantages,—'tis the simple language of the heart that I speak, and the advice and example of my good parents that I endeavour to follow.—I assure you that I *am* humbly born, but I hope that circumstance will not induce you to reject my services."

"I have already said," answered the stranger, "that I am grateful to Heaven for the kindness you offer.—How far from hence is the Ursuline Convent, or the Abbey of St. Hubert?" "Little more than a league," replied Lewis. "I feared they

they were too distant for my wishes.—But, good young man, will you solemnly promise to conduct my unfortunate, dearly-beloved child to that convent; the only asylum at present that can protect her innocence when I shall be released from all mortal sufferings—when the sad hour arrives that will leave her an orphan?"

"My father!—my dear, dear father!" again exclaimed the agonised female, sinking at his feet and covering her face.—Lewis was almost distracted, "I beg,—I beseech you, Sir, to be persuaded to leave this damp and dreary place;—I will procure assistance to convey you to the poor but warm dwelling where my parents reside.—I will fly," continued he, "to bring those that shall remove you from hence."

He waited not for an answer, fearful that it would again repress his ardent wishes, but

but sprang over the broken fragments, regardless of danger from the crumbling ruins, to a part of the forest where he knew some wood-cutters were generally at work, and happily found three young men who readily accompanied him back to the castle, where their wonder was lost in compassion for the weak state of the poor invalid;—and the vulgar stare of gaping surprise when they first cast their eyes on the trembling female, sank into reverence and sorrow as they beheld her tender anxiety for the accommodation of her father.

The friendly peasants bore him gently through the forest, whilst his daughter, accepting the proffered arm of Lewis, followed, in a state of agitation difficult to describe.

When arrived within a short distance of the humble cottage of his grandfather, Lewis quickened his pace, to prepare for the

the reception of such guests as had never been seen in that retired spot.

The good old folks were astonished to behold him enter, with a lovely girl hanging on his arm, whose air and mein were of a superior kind, but in whose countenance the traces of grief and anxiety were but too visible not to call forth the tenderest interest in the bosoms of those children of nature. Age had not yet palsied their feelings, nor deprived them of that untaught, intuitive civility and kindness due to the afflicted and unfortunate.—The old man rose from his arm chair, and brushing off the dust with the skirt of his coat, offered it to the lady, whilst the good woman exclaimed, "Good gracious!—where have you found this poor dear young madam?—Pray now sit down, you shall have a little spice wine in a minute."

The

The young woman sat down, but not in the arm chair, and Lewis hastily explained the situation of the gentleman, who in a few minutes was brought in and placed in the seat his daughter had declined. Without asking any further questions the good dame hobbled about to get some spice wine, her sovereign cordial for all extraordinary occasions;—but before she had the felicity of experiencing its efficacy, the poor invalid fell into successive faintings, which continued some hours, without being capable of swallowing a drop to revive nature now at its last gasp.

Whether the spring of life was quite exhausted, or whether the joyful emotions which agitated his weak frame, that his unfortunate child would not be left desolate and alone in the dismal chapel, as he much dreaded, or whether the fatigue of being removed, had overpowered the small remains of strength that supported him, cannot

cannot be ascertained,—possibly all combined to the same effect;—be it as it may, the hour of dissolution was at hand, he lay speechless and insensible for several hours, till near midnight, and then expired in the arms of his distracted daughter, who in the same instant fell lifeless on the floor.

A scene so fraught with misery as this, made a deep impression on the inhabitants of the cottage; the old folks beheld an awful event, for which they had long been preparing themselves to expect daily in their own persons, with reverential submission to the Almighty fiat, and with heartfelt concern and compassion, for the unfortunate orphan—still more helpless and unhappy than their own Lewis.

But who can describe the feelings of Lewis, when he saw that life was fled from the emaciated body of the father, and seemed in the same moment to burst the cords of

life that held back the sorrowing daughter to the earth? His agonies were beyond description!—One of the young men had remained, and having an active mind, and no fine feelings to weaken his powers, was the only one capable of exertion to recover the young lady, and suggest the necessity of sending to the abbey, for advice and assistance.

Lewis, who supported the unhappy orphan, now struggling with returning life, caught the sound of the word "abbey," and hastily exclaimed—"O, run!—fly!—I had forgot, go to the convent." The man was out of sight in a moment, and the young woman was taken by Lewis into another room; for the one in which the gentleman had just expired, was his bed chamber, to which he had been carried when the successive faintings came on.—The good old folks remained with the corse, familiarising themselves to a scene, awfully impressive

impressive, but fraught with hope and comfort to those, who, like them, had lived a blameless life; and without dread, looked forward to another, and a better world.

When the unhappy young creature recovered her senses, she looked eagerly round the room, then fixing her eye on Lewis, "Where, oh! where is my loved father? I cannot—will not lose him for ever! my God, for ever!"

She burst from the arms that supported her, darted into the other room, and fell on her knees, snatching the lifeless hand that lay on the quilt; and with a look of such inexpressible anguish, gazed silently on the clay-cold emaciated form of the only being entwined about her heart—that a burst of tears fell from the aged eyes of the venerable pair, and Lewis, who had followed her, covered his head, as he knelt at the foot of the bed.

For some moments a general silence prevailed, the overcharged hearts of those present, could not find relief in words; until the good old dame, struggling to repress her audible sobs, and alarmed at the wild and fixed gaze of the distracted orphan—advanced and took her hand.—" My dear child," said she, " you have an Almighty Father and protector in Heaven, he will comfort the afflicted; if he has recalled your earthly parent, his all-seeing eye will direct and preserve the orphan he hath made such; he will be a father to the fatherless.—We the creatures of his omnipotence, must bow in humble submission to his decrees."

With a heavy sigh, and hands clasped in speechless agony, she turned towards her venerable comforter, and seeing the tears still trembling in her eyes, she rose from the floor, and pressing the folded hands of the good woman between her's, reply'd,

" Pray

"Pray for me, pray that I may be enabled to support my heavy lot without impiously arraigning the justice of Heaven, or sinking into despondence and despair. Alas, you know not the full extent of my sad destiny.—There there," added she with encreased agony, pointing to her lifeless parent, "there are entombed all my earthly hopes and prospects for ever."

She sunk back on a chair nearly suffocated, by the heavy sighs that swelled her bosom, and choaked further utterance; but not one tear came to relieve the oppression of her heart, till Lewis, throwing himself on his knees, his manly face pale, and bedewed with the large drops that chased each other down his cheeks, cried out,

"Be more composed, for Heaven's sake be more composed, or you will make me both impious and miserable—your sorrow I cannot bear." He hid his face in her

gown.—"You," said she, violently agitated, "do you thus grieve for an unhappy orphan; what, then must I suffer? How deep are my afflictions, how irreparable is my loss, when even strangers mourn my fate!" The face of Lewis again met her earnest gaze, as he lifted up his head, and in the same moment a gush of tears burst from her eyes, and she fell into hysterics that terrified them almost out of their senses.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

BEFORE she was well recovered, the man who had been sent to the convent, returned with a middle-aged nun, and an elderly priest, who was confessor to the convent, and who happened to be in the house, when the man came, and told his sad tale.

Compassion, and at least, an equal portion of curiosity, impelled them to hasten with the woodcutter to the cottage of Jo-

seph Bethier, where they beheld the poor young creature exhausted by the violence of the fits which had held her some time, and like a lilly bending under a heavy storm, her head hung over the shoulder of the good old dame, whose soft humanity and feebleness of body, was but ill prepared to support scenes of this nature.

"Who is she, what is she, and where did she come from?" were the questions proposed by the nun; whilst the priest had drawn Lewis aside to hear similar interrogatories—neither obtained the desired information. The compassion of the good cottagers had not waited for the gratification of curiosity; like the merciful Samaritan they had beheld a distressed fellow-creature, and sought to the best of their abilities, to bestow the balm of pity, and offer their poor assistance to alleviate the sorrows that were beyond their circumscribed power to cure.

"Well,

"Well, but," said the sister, "these poor people must have a home, or at least must come from *some where*—they were not dropped from the skies into the castle; poor thing! I declare she interests me. She is recovering, what is your name, my dear, who was your father, where did you live?"

"My name, *my name* is misery; my father! alas, I have no father now; no mother, no relative on earth that I know of—not a being in this habitable world to pity or relieve me." A fresh burst of tears threw her head upon the bosom of old Agnes, who tenderly clasped her to her heart.

"Holy Mary," cried the sister, "this is a strange business, a very odd name, misery, and no relations; possibly without money too; well, I do not see what can be done. I'll report it to the abbess—poor thing! indeed she interests me, I pity her greatly;

but she might tell her father's name, and where they came from—one can do nothing for her, a mere chance miserable,—" Cannot you tell," good youth, looking at Lewis, " whether she has any money or not?"

Before he could reply, the unhappy girl raised her head, and putting her hand into her pocket, drew out two louis d'ors, and a few livres; " here," said she meekly, " is I believe, all my worldly wealth, not even sufficient to pay my passport to another world.—Alas! we hoped to have reached the abbey, and from its pious inmates to have received the last sad offices of soft humanity,—but now all is over, I am an insulated being, but short will be my pilgrimage; all I have to implore is a decent grave to cover the dear remains of a man of sorrows.—*Christian charity is all I ask.*"

" Blessed

"Blessed Virgin," exclaimed the pious sister, "how the poor child interests me! but what can be done if she has no money?—Our house is poor, *very poor*, and cannot admit of more inmates; we have scarce bread for ourselves—indeed my poor young creature, *our charity is great*, but we are *very poor*—and as to the funeral, father, what do you say to that?"

Happily the priest, though not known to be overflowing with the milk of human kindness, did feel much compassion for the unhappy orphan; he had likewise a small degree of respect for Lewis, and still more for the sanctity of his own character; all these causes operated to enlarge his charity, and propel him to acts of humanity and kindness.

"What a question," answered he to the nun, "what do you say to that?"—"The unfortunate deceased has a right to the offices

fices of the church; I will apply to the Abbey of St. Hubert on that head, and surely your lady abbess will not refuse shelter to this poor orphan."

"Holy Mary forbid," returned the charitable sister, a little disconcerted by the unexpected reply, "I will return and mention her miserable situation—without friends, without money, or any relations. Oh, I wish we were but rich! but our good lady's charity has been a great tax on our funds; we are poor, very poor indeed! but I will do my best to get the poor thing received, for she interests me greatly—without money, or friends, sad, very sad indeed."

Whilst this humane woman uttered her repetition of unfeeling nonsense, Lewis bled with indignation and terror for the effects it might produce on the deeply afflicted young woman—how was he surprised then, when withdrawing herself from the

the encircling arms of the worthy Agnes, with a collected—dignified air of calm sorrow and resignation, she thus addressed the *humane* sister.

"Stop, I beseech you, make no application to the abbess; I will not be a burthen on the revenues of *your convent*—already so very poor. If these truly good people will allow me to sit by the lifeless remains of my beloved parent, until this charitable man procures for them the last asylum of a quiet grave, I have no more to ask. Nothing for myself, I have no wish to impose my sorrows upon an already over-burthened charity."

The pious sister looked awed and astonished; she had quick perceptions, "this haughty young woman must belong to somebody; she was not a common person—the convent might eventually be benefited through her connections." She was instantaneously

taneously affectionate and urgent, the epithet of poor creature was exchanged for "my dear child, compose yourself,—if we are poor, we are yet more humane. The good abbess will be a mother to you,—yes, I foresee, you will soon engage her affection;—I will run to prepossess her in your behalf,—we shall soon return to conduct you to our happy asylum."

Without waiting for a reply, she shot out of the cottage, and left every one in it disgusted with her selfish hypocrisy,—for the change in her countenance and style, discovered the alteration of her sentiments, produced by the innate nobleness of mind, that influenced an unhappy orphan to rise above the idea of soliciting protection, from the niggard bounty of ostentatious charity.

The good old Agnes clasping her hand, exclaimed, "yes, my dear young lady, if you

you will accept of *our* poor fare, here you shall remain for as long as you like—thank God, we do not want for the necessaries of life; we are not poor, not so very poor but can always afford a good meal, if you will be so good and so humble as to eat with us. That good youth," added she, pointing to Lewis, who was leaning against the door as if lost in thought, "our dear grandson, never fails to give us game, and peas and beans we have plenty of—so you will not want for food, and I will serve you all I can;—tho' old and feeble I have a stout heart, and much good will."

"You have indeed, my dear blessed woman," cried the sensitive plant, now bending her head under a flood of tears, caused by grateful sensibility, which a few moments before were dried up by indignant pride.—"Heaven has given you a heart to pity the fatherless orphan, and that supreme of all blessings, a cheerful contented

tented mind, which kings might envy.—Yes, my dear mother, for a short time, I will remain with *you*; but I beseech you to indulge me, without restraint, to sit by that bed where all my affections, all my hopes are frozen up in the clay-cold bosom of an only parent."

"Oh! no, do not, pray do not indulge despair, and unavailing sorrow, by returning to that room," exclaimed Lewis, starting from his reverie.

"In performing a duty," said she firmly, "I gratify the dearest feelings of my heart; why should we fly from the death-bed of those most dear to us when alive? 'Tis *there* only I can learn due submission to the will of Heaven. Whilst I contemplate the serenity of that face, all my tears and selfish regrets will be hushed into a calm resignation that will enable me to rejoice in his, I humbly hope, eternal happiness.—

How

How great have been his sufferings, alas! too often aggravated by his tender solicitude for me—but, now, he is at rest, I will bear my sorrows deep in my bosom, and patiently submit to the will of an Almighty Father who tempers the shorn lamb to the wind."

She arose; and with trembling steps retired to the chamber of death, not one opposing her; for all felt abashed and confounded by the calm dignity of her air, and the solemnity of her voice and words.

"Good gracious," cried old Agnes, "she is an angel to be sure; yet how she took on at first poor dear soul! I believe in my conscience it was that prating cold-hearted nun, that has given her so much composure.—Oh, how she looked at her! I would not have had such a look for the world; but,

but, dear Lewis, tell us all about where you found them."

"In the old castle," answered he, "but I cannot give you the particulars now—pray be attentive to her, get something for dinner."—"Yes," said she, "and suppose you step to neighbour Danois, and ask for his eldest daughter Janetta to come over and serve her."

"Thank ye, dear mother, for the thought, I will run for her immediately."

Old Joseph had seen and heard all that had passed, not without emotion and feeling; but the sudden surprise and shock had so seized upon his faculties, that mute and unheeded he remained by the side of the corse, the door of the rooms being open, so that he was in a manner present, though not one of the party.—The entrance of the poor orphan, who

who shut the door after her, caused him to start suddenly with a faint exclamation; the rustling and voice reaching her ear, she flew to the side of the bed.—"My father, my father lives!" exclaimed she, and instantly fell senseless on the floor.

The noise of her fall, and the piercing sound of her voice, brought in Dame Agnes. Not a little terrified at seeing her on the ground, and casting her eyes on the bed, she beheld her husband falling on it across the lifeless body of the deceased.

The good old woman stood for a moment petrified, her looks alternately directed to these terrifying objects; when natural affection impelled her first movement towards her husband.—"Joseph, good gracious, my dear Joseph! why what is all this sad business?" She saw his

his eyes move, and he lifted one hand which she took hold of to raise him; but alas! that was past her skill.

He had been so completely agitated by the melancholy and sudden death of the stranger, so buried in reflection on the uncertain tenure of life, that the quick entrance of the young lady, and her loud exclamation, altogether occasioned a shock so violent on his spirits, as stagnated his senses; and an instant paralytic affection deadened one side, and he fell on the bed, as his astonished wife entered the room.

When the poor woman found he was incapable of speaking, or moving himself, and that all her efforts to assist him were ineffectual, her exclamations were loud and violent; then running to the unfortunate cause of her present distress, she beheld life returning by the quickness

quickness of her respiration.—In haste to sprinkle a little water on her face, she quite deluged her, and unknowing what she did, she hastened to the bed, and bestowed a no less copious shower over poor Joseph, who was already but too cold.

In this critical moment Lewis returned with the young girl.—The scene that presented itself to his view, had nearly annihilated his senses; and his good mother wringing her hands, cried, "Oh, my dear boy, your poor grandfather is just dead, and the young lady will die too—what a sad, sad day, is this to me!"

Lewis divided by contrary feelings, of affection and duty towards his good old parent, and a nameless undefinable impulse that drew him towards the lovely girl lying on the floor, stood for an instant

stant suspended, when a heavy sigh from the latter caused him to fly to her assistance; transported when he beheld her eyes open, and her lips endeavouring to articulate, he tenderly raised her from the floor, and placing her in an arm chair, luckily saw a cup with the small remains of his good mother's spiced wine, which he obliged her to swallow.

This seasonable cordial restored her to speech;—"My father, said she, my father lives!"—"Oh, no," replied Lewis, who apprehended her senses were disordered, "oh, no, not in this world, but I trust, in Heaven he will enjoy everlasting life." "I heard him speak," said she, rising and making towards the bed, her trembling limbs obliged her to lean upon Lewis, and then she saw poor Joseph lying almost lifeless by the side of the corse.

She

She shrieked, and dropping her head on the shoulder of the supporter, was by him replaced in the chair. "Compose yourself, dear lady," cried Lewis, inexpressibly terrified, "it was the voice of my poor grandfather you must have heard, though I cannot account for this scene of distress; let me beseech you to take comfort, that I may assist my good mother."

"Oh, go, go," returned she, "think not of me; I see too plainly I have been under a fatal mistake—go, pray go, pray go,—what sorrow and distress have I brought into this peaceful cottage!"

She covered her face, and threw her head back on the chair. Lewis then hastened to Agnes and Janette, for so was the young girl called who had accompanied him.—He found their efforts had been ineffectual to lift poor Joseph from the bed, the deadness of his limbs giving

giving additional weight to his body.—He was more successful, but he saw at the same time that life was at its last ebb, and the vital spark that animated the body had received a shock that palsied all its energies, and would very soon cease to beat.

Almost distracted by the concurrence of disastrous events that had taken place that day; Lewis was just going to send off Janette to call in a neighbour or two, when the door opened, and the priest, followed by the nun, entered the room.

Their surprise was extreme to see the hand of death upon poor Joseph Berthier, Agnes embracing, weeping, and lamenting over him; the unhappy orphan transfixed in her chair, her eyes wildly glancing over the different objects as the handkerchief dropped from her face; and Lewis, agitated, and almost frantic from the impossibility

sibility, as it seemed, of assisting either the one or the other.

"Holy Mary!" cried the nun, "what are we to have another death scene!—Is poor Joseph on the verge of purgatory? Dear father, exercise your functions, do not let the wretched sinner depart without receiving extreme unction."

"Wretched sinner!" repeated Agnes, starting up as the priest advanced to the dying man,—"we are all sinners no doubt, but my good husband was always an honest, worthy man; he had charity in his heart for every fellow creature—he never denied to share his little mite with every poor, or unhappy child of sorrow—he did all the good he could; his children were honest and virtuous—he trained up this youth to do his duty towards God and Man. And let me tell *you*, holy mother, that on *your* death-bed, I wish you

to leave the world with the same upright conscience that will carry my poor Joseph to Heaven. Yes, I humbly trust, *to Heaven*, in the Lord's good time."

There were some points in this speech that surprised and displeased the nun—nor was the priest entirely satisfied with it; but the former, throwing a disdainful glance on the good old woman, again urged the priest to prepare the sacrament. Alas! before any such preparations could take place, scarcely had she spoken, when without a groan, the spirit of a just and worthy man fled to Heaven. While Agnes, dropping on her aged knees, implored the Almighty Father of the pure in spirit to receive his soul into everlasting happiness. Amen, was solemnly pronounced by all present, who were affected by the earnest supplication of the pious woman, and joined with the priest in prayers for the salvation of the deceased.

The

The sudden event had at first terrified the good Agnes, but she had long been preparing herself to expect it from age and infirmity; and the poignancy of her feelings being blunted by time, and the loss of her children, when assured that all was over, and that her beloved husband was released from life without pain, or even a single struggle with the grim tyrant death, she rose from her knees, and brushing off the large drops that fell on her furrowed cheeks—"In a little while," said she, "we shall meet again!—And now let us turn to this poor lady, who hath had dismal scenes enough for one day. What shall we do to comfort her?"

"Why," answered the nun, looking very important, "I told you how much she interests me, so I have been pleading hard for her to our Lady Abbess, and the blessed virgin crowned my prayers with success. Our lady was so moved by my elo-

quence, that notwithstanding the poverty of our house, and its reduced grandeur, she has consented to receive her into the convent, until some plan can be devised for her future support. — Poor thing," added she, shrugging up her shoulders, "'tis a sad case indeed, neither money nor friends; but very lucky for her that I came here, another person might not have been interested for her as I am."

"My son," said the priest to Lewis, before any answer could be returned to the nun, "I have obtained permission to inter the deceased stranger in the burying ground belonging to our abbey, provided he was a good catholic; and your worthy grandfather shall share the same grave.—Speak, my good child," added he, addressing the young lady, "was your father of our holy mother church,—will you inform me of his name and condition?"

"The

"The latter I *cannot do*," answered she, in a solemn impressive voice, but I can declare upon my sacred honour, that he was a true catholic; and that tho' his destiny has been unfortunate, he has never been designedly criminal, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"Enough, my child, he shall have the rites of burial, and our prayers for his soul: But what name shall be inscribed on his coffin?"

She paused a moment at this question, then answered, "Simply the initials of A. C. M. aged forty-seven."

"Forty-seven!" exclaimed the nun, "why he looks sixty at least."—"Sorrow," returned she, deeply sighing, "has indeed given to him all the appearance of age;—every hope in life cruelly blighted, and a never-ceasing corroding anxiety at his

heart, has furrowed his face with the marks of time, and dragged him to a premature grave."

She covered her face again, but her stifled sighs, and audible sobs, could not be repressed from reaching the ears of all present, and inspiring the most heart-felt concern in the bosom of Lewis.

The priest who had been attending to a whisper from the nun, again turned towards Lewis, and drawing him into the other room, enquired more particularly concerning the deceased, supposing that the young man knew more than he chose freely to reveal.

But his curiosity could obtain no gratification; Lewis was equally a stranger to their name and circumstances. — "Had they no property, no valuables or clothes with them?—Surely they could not be entirely

tirely destitute of necessaries—how were they to exist?"

"A small trunk, which the young lady gave into my hand, and a parcel, which I believe contains some linen, were all I saw, and all that was brought here with them."

"Well, and what is in the trunk, and where is it?" eagerly demanded the nun, who had followed them close, unobserved by Lewis.

"What is in it?" replied Lewis, indignantly, turning quick upon her, "how should I know, or who should dare to ask the question?—There it is," added he, pointing to a red leather trunk, about ten inches deep, and a foot and a half long; "but its contents are sacred, whatever they may be; and with my life I will protect her, and whatever belongs to her, from insult or peculation."

The nun and the father absolutely stared, as if frightened by the energetic language of the young peasant; who was a stranger to the former, and consequently language so little appropriate to his situation, excited her wonder, and stimulated her eternal curiosity to know something more of him also.

The priest had often met the young man in the forest; and a certain air of intelligence above the common wood-cutters, had induced him to enter into frequent conversations with him, in the course of which he discovered an uncommon share of understanding, and powers of great capability. Added to which, his general character among the peasantry, as the best young man in the neighbourhood, and the chief support of his aged relatives, had impressed the priest with a respect for him, far above what he

was

was entitled to hope for, from the humbleness of his situation.

But though he had often admired the good sense of Lewis, he was not prepared to expect in him a delicacy of mind, and an energy of character, superior to impertinent curiosity, and with a resolution to cherish and protect the unfortunate "at the hazard of his life."

The nun and the father exchanged significant looks, but the trunk was the chief object of *her regards*. Its size was not competent to contain wearing apparel, consequently there must be some valuables; for though the young stranger had freely exposed the lowness of her purse, it was not consistent with reason to believe they were without some resources, and she instantly, and charitably concluded, there were both falsehood and deception in the reserve of the orphan girl—and that con-

scious guilt had tied her tongue from a disclosure of their name and circumstances.

But these charitable inferences of her's, by no means operated to impede her intention of taking her to the convent.—Avarice had suggested schemes that influenced her to return into the other room, and press the innocent afflicted girl to accompany her immediately to that asylum. "No," said she, "I have already declared I will stop here till the last melancholy duties are paid to my father.—I thank you, my good mother, and request my duty to your Lady Abbess, who has so generously consented to receive me; whether I shall avail myself of her benevolence I know not, at present I can determine upon nothing but to remain with this good woman, who has like me to mourn the loss of those most dear to her."

"Aha!"

"Aha!" thought the nun, "now you have betrayed yourself; if you had not some good things in reserve, you would not hesitate to enter a habitation where you may be maintained free of expence.—Very well, my pretty one, but you shall not escape us in this manner."

Whilst these ideas floated on her mind, and she regarded the young woman in profound silence, the priest was assuring her of his friendship, and gave her to understand that to his charitable exertions alone, she would be indebted that her deceased parent was allowed a decent burial.

Humbled by the continual repetition of the word charity, and with a bosom, lacerated by sorrow, a mind overpowered by a thousand painful retrospections, she clasped her hands together in an agony that penetrated to the heart of Lewis.

"I feel," said she, "the weight of all these obligations in their full force—the God of mercy will reward your good intentions, and the unhappy fatherless orphan will offer up her orisons to Heaven to bless you for your good deeds; but I beseech you to leave me alone, my head is disordered, my mind disturbed, I cannot any longer support conversation."

As they saw she really looked faint, and almost sinking from her seat, the nun and the priest took leave for the present; the former assuring her of her zeal for her happiness, the latter telling Lewis of necessary particulars relative to the interment of the two deceased persons.

At length they reluctantly departed, promising what was not solicited by any one, "that they would come again the following day, to console, and teach them proper submission to the will of Heaven."

"I

"I am sure," said the good woman, "that *I do submit*, and want none of their consolements to teach me my duty. My dear good man and I lived in love and harmony with each other, and in charity with the world, and we shall very soon be joined again; for I feel as if I had lost the friend of my heart, and that heart will shortly be cold in this life, and receive new life with him in the world to come."

"My dear mother," cried Lewis, "do not encourage desponding ideas; endeavour to cheer this lovely mourner, whose drooping spirits are exhausted by the calamities of this eventful day."

"Both causes and events are in the direction of Providence," answered the young lady, "and submission to its decrees is our sacred duty; but when I see the grief and trouble I have brought into this house, my sorrows are doubly augmented, and I cannot

not stifle my regrets that we consented to your kind importunities, and that such well-meant assistance to the unfortunate, should have cost you so dear."

The worthy Agnes observing the faint voice in which she spake, pressed her to lie down, to which she made no opposition, but retired into the bed room belonging to the good couple now so suddenly separated.

The many occurrences of the day were now discussed between Lewis and his grandmother; and though both sincerely loved the departed Joseph, yet neither felt that poignancy in affliction which in early life attends the loss of those most dear to us.

That grief which fixes on the heart, is rarely felt in the downhill of our days, when the feelings are palsied by age, or a long endurance

endurance of evil. Agnes had accustomed herself to think, and to talk of death, as a friendly passport to another world; and having witnessed its iron hand so gently laid, as to close for ever the eyes of two fellow creatures, almost without a sigh, and in no visible pain, she seemed to regard the stroke as an inevitable one, that would soon arrest her own steps, and to which she looked forward without terror or apprehension.

"My dear boy," said she, "your dutiful cares for your aged parents will soon be at an end, and God will reward you for all your good deeds.—You will shortly be at liberty to seek for your own support alone, and to quit the forest, to find better employment. But my dear Lewis, never let your heart be corrupted by a commerce with the world; preserve your virtues, your integrity, and humanity. You may be scorned for the lowness of your birth, for

for the meanness of your employments—but honest endeavours will always procure you a maintainance; and whilst you can enjoy a good conscience, free from self-reproach, or conscious shame, you will be happier, my son, than the lordly beings, who may seem to despise your humble situation."

"My dear mother," exclaimed Lewis, "why all these admonitions just now, I trust that I shall never depart from the paths of truth and integrity—do not suppose that I feel my duty to you as bringing with it trouble and constraint; 'tis the chief pleasure of my life to contribute to your comforts, therefore say no more on that head."

"Well, then, my beloved son, let us talk about the poor young lady;—what do you think of her?"

"I feel her sorrows to my very soul," answered Lewis, "and I confess also that

I am not prejudiced in favour of the nun—but possibly the Lady Abbess may be a different woman; yet I cannot help feeling regret, and much reluctance against the necessity that seems to urge her to make the convent her future asylum."

"I see no such necessity," returned she warmly, "if she will accept of our homely fare, she is as welcome, as if she were my nearest relation, to remain here with us."

Lewis made no reply, but by a sigh, and a gentle movement of his head, for his natural good sense, and intuitive idea of decorum, pointed to him at once the impropriety of a lovely young and unprotected girl residing with his aged mother, and himself; and whilst his reason spake against it, his bosom heaved a sigh of regret, at the imperious dictates of prudence, that militated against his wishes.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

A Melancholy sadness, the consequence of a sleepless night to the inhabitants of the cottage, pervaded each countenance when they met in the morning. Lewis, however reluctant to leave his mother and her guest, was under the necessity of going to the Abbey of St. Hubert, to attend the orders of the fraternity.

Janette was handy and attentive, she engaged to render every service in her power. The

The young lady under an evident oppression of grief, yet spake more collected and calmly than could have been expected—she pressed the hand of Agnes with great tenderness, "We are fellow mourners," said she, "but we do not mourn without hope. Virtuous men have their reward in Heaven, and the path is before us to follow their steps, and be re-united to them hereafter.—Let us reflect on that hope, my good woman, and bow with submission to the decrees of Providence."

"You are a dear sweet angel," replied Agnes, lifting her hand to her trembling lips, "yes, you were sent to be my comforter.—Joseph was indeed a virtuous man—in his youth he was steward to a great Lord; his father, an honest farmer, and tolerably rich, had him taught at a good school which was kept by my father, and there it was we began to love

love each other—and so when Joseph grew up, the lord of our village hearing of his good character and understanding, made him his steward; upon which he courted me, and with our parents' consent, we were married.

"Ah! madam, those were happy days, we had several children, but only one lived, the father of our good Lewis. But in that time sad changes happened; our young lord went to Paris, and to Italy, to England, and the lord knows where besides—and he fell into bad company, spent a deal of money, had all his timber cut down, racked the poor tenants, and grieved my poor Joseph to the very soul, who was often writing and advising him to no purpose.

"At length after five years absence, home he came to the country, with a fine gay madam, not a wife, and she lived at such a rate, in that summer, that mort-

gages

gages upon mortgages were made to the farmer general—and in short, half broken-hearted at such doings, Joseph one day talked to my lord pretty roundly, before madam, who flew in a passion, abused him, and ordered him to give in his accounts, and leave her castle;—*her* castle! a wicked woman!

"Well, madam, poor Joseph, though he loved and respected his master, could not be sorry to go when he could no longer do good to his lord or his tenants; so he made up his accounts and was dismissed. He then took a farm of his own, and we went on comfortable and happy, if we were not rich.

"The father of Lewis was a good son, and helped as he grew up to manage the farm, and before he was twenty, he married the orphan daughter of a miller, who left her nothing but an example of honest

"Oh, dreadful!" exclaimed the young lady.—"Heaven sure must have inspired you with fortitude, to support such calamities without sinking under them."

"True," resumed Agnes, "it was the goodness of Heaven that preserved our senses—for our calamities did not end here. We had leased the house and adjoining farm. My husband had only a small estate of his own, on which there was no house, about a mile from us; for my good Joseph was not like many stewards who grow rich at their masters' expence—he was the soul of integrity, he disbursed many pounds of his own money, to ease the poor tenants, but never wronged his lord of a crown—therefore when dismissed, small were the advantages he had to shew for his services.

"Well madam, the fire having consumed the leased house, the landlord seized upon our small estate, to reimburse himself,

self, and he being rich, a farmer general, against whose power there was no appeal, not only possessed himself of that, but of another little farm, bequeathed to us by my husband's father—and we were left destitute, deprived of all.

"In vain the whole village sued to this hard-hearted man, he was immovable as a rock. The kind neighbours offered to raise a little subscription for us, but my Joseph said, he had health and strength yet to work, and Lewis could help him.

"We left the village, and took this hut in the forest; it was a sad place—we have done all we could to make it comfortable. Several friends sent us little pieces of furniture, beds and such things; and the minister of our parish dying about that time, left us twelve louis a year, which was a noble legacy.

"Joseph and Lewis turned wood-cutters, but for the last six years, poor Joseph failed; age and the rheumatism rendered him incapable of work—and he has been long declining, and daily expecting his recal to Heaven, where all his sufferings are over, and his integrity and goodness will meet reward.

"My dear Lewis is now near twenty; he will soon have to close my eyes, and I humbly trust, that our Almighty Father will protect and reward his unceasing duty to us from infancy to the present hour.

"Thus, Lady, I have told you our little history—the sufferings of a humble pair, who have felt every calamity that can befal humanity; and have only been supported by a good conscience, and the blessed hope of a better world. Forgive me if I have tired you, but I think it right to shew you, how many are the sorrows and accidents that

that may overtake even those in humble life; and that there is no condition, age, or sex, exempt from misfortunes incident to human nature."

"My good, my worthy mother!" exclaimed her young auditress, warmly embracing her, "I feel the full intention of your kindness, and will learn from you to bear my sorrows as becomes a reasonable being and a christian. Your's have been severe trials indeed; but I no longer wonder at the good sense and humanity of your son Lewis, which I thought extraordinary in a mere peasant—though his birth is humble, the examples before him, and the lessons he has been taught, have given him a heart and sentiments that would dignify a coronet."

Agnes, delighted to hear her Lewis praised, felt such a warmth of affection towards her guest, that she rather abruptly

cried out, "Then you will stay with me and my dear boy?" "For a short time, my dear mother, I will accept your offered kindness. — It was the intention of my much lamented parent to place me in the convent, and go himself to the Abbey of St. Hubert—but I believe he was not aware that those religious houses were so very poor."

"Ah!" cried Agnes, significantly shaking her head, "the nuns and priests love money full as much as those who reside in the world. Charity is cold enough except in profession, for when put to the proof, their protection is rarely extended but to such as can pay for it."

"Yet," returned the other, "you heard the nun assure me of a reception there; and the priest has undertaken all the expences for my beloved father's funeral."

"True,"

"True," replied Agnes, "but I still think they believe you have some property."

"I know not," said the young lady, after a pause, "what may be contained in a small trunk I brought here, I believe 'tis chiefly papers. Will you examine his pockets, the key is in one of them; perhaps it may be necessary to open the trunk, though I do not expect any thing of consequence, as I know my dearest father seemed anxious that the little money I had, should hold out till we reached the convent."

Agnes soon brought her the key, also the trunk; and then leaving the room, she said, "Excuse me, dear Lady, if I am too free in cautioning you, whatever may be contained in that trunk of value to yourself, or of consequence to your future welfare, unless obliged by necessity, or in compliance with the will of your father,

do not make confidants of the nun or the priest—know them well first, before you trust them. Keep your own secrets, if you have any that materially affect you; for though I know little of the world or its inhabitants, I well remember the instructions of my father, and good counsel of poor Joseph, not to rely upon hasty professions of regard, nor disclose your affairs to those who have no concern in them."

The young lady could only answer with her tears, and a slight inclination of her head; for the key and the trunk had revived so many unpleasant occurrences—had recalled to her mind such a number of melancholy scenes, that it was several minutes before she was capable of going through the examination she thought a necessary duty.

She had been above two hours alone, when Agnes a little uneasy, knocked at the door,

door, " Speak my dear child, and tell me you are well; that is all I want to know."

Startled from a painful reverie, she rose, opened the door, and flinging her arms round the neck of the good woman, " My dear mother, how kind you are! Yes I am well, well as I can possibly be with a lacerated heart, that bleeds at every pore. Heaven support me to do my duty, and obey the sacred will of him who gave me being, now, alas, no more!"

A fresh gush of tears streamed down her face as she hung over the shoulder of Agnes, whose aged eyes overflowed as she pressed her to her bosom.

In this speechless sorrow they were found by Lewis, who was inexpressibly shocked at the moving scene.—" Take comfort, madam,—I entreat you, my dear mother, do not thus give way to grief for

an event you have long expected, and I hoped was prepared to meet with patience."

"True my child," said she, wiping off the natural drops, "I am very wrong, but this sweet lady,—who but must grieve for her? However," added she, rising, "I should rather give an example of fortitude to her, than weaken her mind by the feebleness of mine. My good young lady, let us seek for consolation from above, and not give way to unavailing sorrow for those who are removed from all pain and care."

The fair mourner was trying to compose her features, when, before she could speak, the nun entered.—"Well, my pretty child, how are you? I am come ambassadress of good news; our Lady Abbess consents to receive you, and it will be your own fault if you are not happy. Ah! my dear child, what a blessing to be far removed from the temptations of the vain world—to live in

in perfect love and harmony, free from deceit, selfishness and pride.—Yes, my sweet lamb, I will be a mother to you; I will counsel you, and inform you who you are to be attached to, what conduct you shall observe, and of those among the sisterhood, who you are to avoid as improper and infectious company."

"How," cried her intended pupil, "have you improper persons to associate with in your convent? I thought all the sisters were pious, good and charitable—all religious, and dead to the foibles of the world."

"No doubt, no doubt," answered the nun hastily, "but every one though good and pious, is not equally good tempered, nor quite so obliging as some others.—Holy Mary, forbid we should have any but pious sisters in our house! But you are very young, and I would recommend

you to those most suited to your age and disposition."

"I thank you, my good mother," returned she coldly, "but I shall defer going from hence at least for a month."

"A month!" repeated the nun with looks of astonishment and vexation, "a month! Why, how are you to live here if you have no money or friends? These poor people can barely get bread for themselves; you do not mean to rob them of their poor little pittance sure?" "Heaven forbid! no, not for the world would I injure this good woman."

"But we are not so poor, not so *very poor*," retorted Agnes, "but we can give this dear lady a hearty welcome to such fare as we have, and shall be proud of her company, for I already love her dearly."

"Sympathy

"Sympathy softens the hearts of fellow sufferers; I believe our affections are mutual," said the lady, "and since you approve of it, I shall certainly stop here a few weeks."

"Holy St. Ursula! what, do you refuse going to the convent then! after all my trouble, persuasions, and kindness, are you so ungrateful and indiscreet, to refuse such an asylum as I have procured for you?"

"No, I have not, I do not refuse it, in proposing to stop here a short time; I do not intend to decline your kind offices, or be deemed ungrateful to your good Lady Abbess."

"What, then my dear child, you will come among us very shortly—and why not go with me at once? Come, come, let me entreat you, my sweet creature, leave

leave this house of mourning, and come with me."

"Do not compel me to appear rude and disobliging; I have important reasons in my own opinion, for adhering to the resolution I have formed to remain here for a short period—I am not insensible to kindness, but I must be allowed to judge for myself."

"Ah! my lovely child," returned the nun, "youth is very incompetent to act without a friendly adviser; the world is so deceptive, and even the best of human hearts so liable to be hurried away by the impetuosity of its impulses, that it is only in holy retirement like our's, where virtue dwells uncontaminated, and where the errors of youthful minds are corrected by bright examples, and devout exercises."

Lewis, who had rather impatiently attended to this dialogue, now ventured to say, "My good mother, you have heard the lady's determination, why then distress her thus, by urging a request contrary to her inclinations, and wound her mind by filling it with such gloomy pictures of human nature?"

The nun turned upon him with an aspect by no means favourable, when her eye caught the red leather trunk, with the key in the lock. Her thoughts were instantaneously changed to a different object.—"St. Joseph, forbid," said she, "that *I* should distress the dear lady! but apropos, my dear child, what are we to call you? These good folks, as well as me, feel so aukward, saying the lady, and the lady, at every word." My name," answered she coldly, "is Hermine, and my friends will be so kind as to call me so in future."

"Mademoiselle

"Mademoiselle Hermine,—well, but that is your christian name only."—"And the only one, madam, that I choose to be distinguished by."

"Dear me, well there is a secret I see; for my part I never pry into secrets, I hate to be inquisitive, so my dear Hermine, your other name, which I suppose, begins with an M, as that initial is to be placed on the coffin, whether it be Montmorency, Malabert, Montesqueu, Montalbert, or——"

"Any one among a hundred other names beginning with an M," said Hermine, abruptly interrupting her, "it is of no consequence to any but myself; and as I have an utter aversion to interrogatories, it is happy for me, my good mother, that *you* are above that curiosity, oftentimes oppressive, and always impertinent."

The

The nun blushed scarlet deep at this implied rebuke, but from that moment malice was added to curiosity, and she resolved this secret, so carefully guarded, should be divulged, by her management, at some future time.—However one point was gained, Hermine was more likely to be her name, than the one she had mentioned in her paroxysm of grief.—Still she wanted to know what were the contents of this trunk, but dared not signify her wishes, after the severe retort of Mademoiselle Hermine.

The priest soon after came in, and addressed himself to the young lady in a voice so soothing and language so appropriate to her feelings, that she entered freely into conversation with him and Lewis. Agnes withdrew to her kitchen, the nun followed her.

"My

"My good Mother Berthier, your charity is very commendable, after the sudden death of your husband, which no doubt was owing to the fright he received by these strangers; one dying, and the other putting you all in terror and confusion by the excess of her grief. Therefore really your kindness may be called an act of supererogation, to keep her and treat her as your own child."

"I do not know what act you may call it," answered Agnes dryly, "but I call it an act of duty to serve the sick, and be a friend, to the best of my ability, (which Heaven knows is limited enough) to the fatherless orphan. Little is in my power, but that little she may command; and far from blaming her, or her poor father, for the death of my Joseph, I am sensible it was Heaven's appointed time to release him from a helpless comfortless state, and receive him

him into the blessed abode of the good and righteous."

"How," cried the nun, "do you presume to think he is already received above, without being cleansed from his sins by the prayers of the church, to relieve him from purgatory?—Dare you pronounce him to be good and righteous, a sojourner in this sinful world?"

"I must tell you this, good mother," returned Agnes, with some asperity, "had his life been sinful, and his deeds evil, I cannot believe the prayers of the church would have availed much to get him out of purgatory.

"Thank Heaven, Joseph was an honest—upright man; he did his duty towards all men, and was thankful to the giver of all good gifts for those he received. He bore his misfortunes meekly, and

and never repined—he was ready to do good to the utmost of his power, and died, I am sure, in humble confidence, that a good son, husband, father, and friend, a heart of integrity, and a devout sense of his duty to God, would smooth his passage to another world without fear of purgatory."

The nun was excessively enraged, and had nearly suffered her anger and resentment to outstep her prudence; but a moment's pause made her recollect she had lost sight of her motive for following Agnes. Repressing her swelling indignation, she contented herself with saying, "May his soul rest in peace," and telling her beads, she lifted up her eyes as if uttering a silent prayer. Turning to Agnes,

"I feel very much interested for this poor orphan, and am happy that the abbess has

has listened to my suit, for as she has no property what would become of the poor thing—for a small bundle of clothes, and the trifles such a little trunk can contain, must be of no value. I see she has been looking into the trunk."

"*You* see!" said the good woman, staring, "when did you see her look into the trunk? and what business is it of our's to enquire what she has?—*You see!*"

"Yes," returned she, "I saw the key in the lock as it stood by her. But indeed you are too hasty—are they not strangers without a name—how do we know whether they be not wicked persons, flying from a home they have disgraced? — 'Tis not common, for decent looking people to have neither house nor home."

"When I came to this cottage," said Agnes, "*I* fled from my native village without

without a house or a home; unfortunate accidents had made *me* poor and houseless, yet, thank Heaven, I was not wicked, nor had I disgraced the place I lived in. And shall *I* have less charity for others than I wanted for myself? No, mother, I have known troubles and misfortunes, I can believe such may overtake the virtuous and even affluent; and never will I suspect the unfortunate wanderer, whilst I can have a plea for confidence and charity."

"You are good, *very good*," replied the nun, shrugging her shoulders, "and, *I hope*, your charity will not be ill placed; but still I say, being strangers, and the man dying suddenly, 'tis necessary for your own safety, and much more for that of Lewis, who brought them here, that you should understand a little of their affairs and character. Why does she make a mystery of both, if she has nothing to apprehend from a discovery?—If she is poor she

she can have nothing to fear, *for who trouble themselves about folks when they are reduced to poverty.* And if her character has no stain upon it, why be ashamed to declare her name?—In short, she either has *concealed* valuables, or must be poor; if the first, I hope she came honestly by them, but that will admit of a doubt while she is so mysterious—and if she is a poor unfortunate orphan, surely she ought to disclose every circumstance, to justify the charity of those who help her."

"Once for all," answered Agnes, "I must say, that she is entitled to our kind offices, because she wants them. I do not pretend to reason with you, but I know that in all circumstances one ought to have a little respect for one's self—people that are too humble will soon be trodden down by the scorn of the proud. Poor soul! I believe her to be innocent and unfortunate; and whether she has a livre more than what she

she pulled from her pocket, I neither know nor shall ever ask. And why do you urge her to go into the convent if you suspect her?—Let her stay with me, she is heartily welcome, as I have said before; and her little trunk may remain here for ever, before *I* shall have a desire to know what it contains; nor has any body a right to ask her impertinent questions about her affairs, in my opinion."

"Very well, very well indeed, Dame Berthier, you are a good woman, you speak my sentiments exactly. I hate curiosity—I think very kindly of her—Holy Mary forbid! that I should lack charity for the poor wanderer, an orphan, without parents, or a home. No, no, *I hope she is a good-hearted, honest young woman.* She has fallen into a bed of luck in coming here, for many would have a thousand suspicions to her disadvantage; and to be sure, their being found in a ruinous castle might

might prejudice weak minds against them, because it looked as if they fled to hide themselves among the ruins—and flight, you know, good Berthier, implies guilt."

"I know no such thing, because, I say, that folks may be driven by misfortunes from their native home; and, in one word, I have faith, hope, and charity, and these lead me to cherish an orphan stranger—so, holy mother, say no more on the subject."

"You are an obstinate, credulous dupe," whispered *the heart* of the nun.—"You are a pious, worthy woman," said she, aloud, "and I shall report you to our good lady abbess as you deserve."

Disappointed in her views of working upon the mind of Agnes, it was with difficulty she resumed her gentle, mortified air when she returned to the presence of Hermine, who was listening to a conversation

sation between the priest and Lewis; the former had his full share of curiosity, but not the malignity of heart which disgraced the nun.

He had asked Lewis how he meant to dispose of himself now his grandfather was dead. "My aged mother is alive," answered he, "and has solemnly declared, her last breath shall also be drawn in this cottage, therefore your question is soon answered."

"Holy St. Hubert!" exclaimed the old man, "why you will not waste the spring of life by burying yourself in this forest as a wood-cutter?—If you had a devout call to enter on a study of religious duties, to live a life of single blessedness, then indeed, my son, I should commend your present mode for the maintenance of your mother, until we could find a way to make her life comfortable; which when once you

you have determined to renounce the world, we should soon hit upon a plan for so doing, and I will speak to our superior upon the subject."

"By no means," exclaimed Lewis, "I have *no devout call*, I do not mean to seclude myself from the world, a world I know nothing of as yet, but I am young enough.—I do not think my time wasted that is employed to support an aged parent, who protected *me* from infancy; and while I have health, Holy Father, my good mother shall never be a burthen upon your house."

The energy of Lewis surprised the priest, but he had discernment enough to perceive that this was not a time for persuasion; he therefore replied shortly, "You are an honest good lad, and I shall be your friend on all occasions."—Then turning to Hermine,

"You, my dear child, have no such drawbacks on a holy vocation—to you a convent must be an asylum from want, and a mansion of peace; and I doubt not but you will have sincerity and frankness enough to unbosom yourself to the holy abbess, and whether misfortunes, or errors have brought on your present distressful circumstances, from her you will receive commiseration and comfort, if you act with candour."

Hermine bowed with a cold, respectful air,—"I shall not presume to enter that holy sanctuary till well convinced that both my heart and my conscience are free from all intentional error."

The priest took this as an equivocal kind of answer, not at all calculated to inspire confidence, or remove doubts. But he was obliged to take it in a literal sense, and

and complimented her on the blessing of being free from guile, and void of offence.

Again he attacked Lewis with questions of "How much he could earn by his employment, and whether the misfortunes of his grandfather had really deprived him of every advantage for his support, but what his (Lewis's) labour produced?"

The youth by no means pleased with so many interrogatories, was about to answer with a degree of asperity that might have proved unpleasant to all parties, when the entrance of the nun and his mother tied his tongue, and he left the room.

In vain did the holy mother try to divert her thoughts, and turn her eyes from the little red trunk—both constantly recurred to the same attractive object;—in that small box was contained all the secrets

so carefully guarded; she was sure of it,—oh, how she longed to explore its contents!

Once more she ventured to wish Hermine would accompany her; this wish was strangled in its birth, before she had finished the sentence. Hermine rose, and turning half aside, for the tears trembled in her eyes,

"Good mother, cease to urge me, my mind is determined, I cannot yet depart from hence, my destiny is undecided; I neither refuse, nor accept the kind offer you make, I must have time to weigh and consider what I ought to do—I am young, unaccustomed to act for myself; I repeat, I must have time for consideration."

"Well, that's very strange, I do not comprehend it; did not your father wish to place you in our convent? I am sure the young man said so."

"He

"He said right, but circumstances are changed,—I am now to decide for myself."

"Oh, to be sure, a most excellent judge at seventeen, of the fit, and the unfit! I know, however, 'tis not very becoming to live in the house with a young man.—But I have done, my dear child, I have only your happiness and salvation at heart—I can have no interest but your good; so I leave you for the present, and shall pray to the holy virgin to protect you, and incline your heart to embrace all things that are good and holy."

"Thank you, dear mother, for your pious cares," was all the answer made by Hermine, as the nun took a last look of the red trunk, and scowled her eyes over its owner.

"I am heartily glad that prating, teazing old woman is gone," said Agnes, "bless me, how she sifted about to ask questions, and know all your affairs,—and for what I wonder, to gratify her curiosity, and love for talking. You were right, my dear young lady, to disappoint her; never be too open to any one so curious as her. Stop here, and welcome for years and years, you shall never catch me prying into your secrets;—they are your own, hold them as such, and as what concerns no one else."

The kind tones of Agnes penetrated to the heart of her young guest, and would quickly have obtained her confidence, had she been at liberty to give it. But the reserve imposed upon her, left her only the power of shewing her sensibility, by a warm embrace she gave the good dame, who returned it with all her heart.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

THE unfortunate father of Hermine, and the good old Joseph, were decently interred in the burial ground of the Abbey of St. Hubert; but the agonising grief of the poor orphan was not buried with her only parent,—it was entombed in her bosom, it broke not out in tears or exclamations. Sad and silent were her sorrows, and their effects visibly impaired her health, and deprived her of all power of exertion.

She would sit hours without speaking, and the heavy languor of her eyes too plainly evinced, that she did not enjoy, "Tir'd nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

In vain did the good Agnes, by the kindest attentions, seek to divert that devouring grief which time or reason seemed not to abate; in vain did Lewis, in mournful sympathy, sigh at each sigh, and glide through the rooms a spectacle of woe—for more than a week she appeared turned within herself, lost in an abyss of misery.

A heart long and severely tried in the school of adversity, accustomed to sorrows, learns patiently to endure them; but the misfortunes that overwhelmed the poor Hermine, fell on a young and inexperienced mind, incapable of struggling against its subduing effects, or of exerting the powers of reason and fortitude, to overcome

come the sense of her painful and forlorn situation.

She had lost a most tender father, and the only being who in this wide world, had ever been interested for her.—What source of consolation could be held out, what hopes, or prospects to support her under a misfortune so immeasurably great?

The good cottagers respected her grief, their attentions were not oppressive—they came from the heart, and she could appreciate their value; she requested that for one week she might not be obliged to see the nun or the priest—the cold officious reasoning of the former she could not bear; she thought better of the latter, but would not venture to make an exclusive distinction, and therefore declined seeing either.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

The

The nun, however, was not so easily repulsed, she would see Agnes—she talked incessantly, she asked a multitude of questions, she endeavoured to inspire the good Berthier with part of her own curiosity;—insidiously threw in doubts, suspicions, and censure, mingled with compassion, charity, and "a wish to help the poor orphan whatever she might be;—for if she was *good*, she deserved assistance, and if, *as to be sure*, there was *some reason to fear*, the father had been culpable, and the daughter ashamed to confess her name, and her errors, yet still it would be meritorious to save a sinful young creature, and preserve her from eternal destruction.

Very impatiently did Agnes attend to this long harangue, this jargon of affected charity and malignancy of heart; but when the nun had run herself out of breath, she answered her short and decisively,—"My good mother, I love and pity this dear young

young lady; she has many sorrows I believe, but I also believe, she does not suffer from sins or errors of her own. Whoever she may be, for *I will never enquire*, whether she be poor or rich, here she is welcome to stay. I will rely on Heaven, and her sweet countenance, that I shall never repent of my charity."

"You are a good creature, Dame Berthier, a very good creature," said the mortified nun, "pity indeed, if charity like your's, *should* be deceived, I hope it will not; for it is inconceivable how much I am interested for her, a poor fatherless orphan, Yes, 'tis impossible to avoid feeling compassion. Pray tell her I have been here, and that she has my prayers for her health and composure; and also set before her the sin of indulging sorrow for departed spirits—let her pray for his soul, but learn to repress grief."

Agnes

Agnes, very desirous to be rid of this talkative, double-tongued woman, promised to report all she requested, and at length saw her turn her back on the cottage with great satisfaction.

Lewis, in the mean time went regularly to his daily occupation; but he was no longer blithe, happy, and delighted that his labours were the support of his aged grandmother — he was pleased in performing a duty, but his cheerfulness had entirely forsook him. At first he tried to persuade himself that it was the shock his sensibility had received by the sudden deaths, which had had such a powerful effect on his spirits; but his mind dwelt lightly on those events, any further than as they were connected with the sorrows and misfortunes of the lovely Hermine.— It was her image that swam before his eyes —her tears that wounded his heart—and she alone that engrossed all his ideas.

He

He no longer bounded to the turrets of the old castle to enjoy the delightful scenery it overlooked—no longer carolled his lively airs, as the wood fell under his axe—or joined in cheerful conversation with his fellow wood-cutters, who however inferior to him in understanding, were in other respects upon an equality with himself.

He sought the most retired part of the forest, where being alone he could indulge meditation; and, unconscious of it himself, drank deep of the intoxicating cup of love, and nourished a fatal passion that was to embitter his existence.

Such was the situation of poor Lewis, who saw the unfortunate Hermine only at meal times; and that awed by respect, tenderness, and a thousand nameless feelings, however eloquent his looks were, his tongue was powerless to express any part of what he felt. Silent attentions, and expressive

pressive sympathy of sorrow, were all the marks that were visible of a too tender passion.

He hourly dreaded to hear that she would remove to the convent.—He bitterly regretted that he had called in the officious nun—yet, could he suppose that she would continue to reside in a wood-cutter's cottage?—His grandmother, 'twas true, was in some degree superior to her situation in life, from having received all the instructions and advantages a country schoolmaster had the power to bestow; and limited as those advantages were, *he* had derived benefit from her maternal care, and the advice of her worthy Joseph, who having in early life been a lord's steward, had profited something by his intercourse with the family.

He had once prided himself in being a little distinguished from his companions, of

of being noticed by the priest—but now all his self-exultation shrank into nothing. The dignified air of Hermine, her elegant figure, the air of grandeur visible in her father, though bowed down with sickness, and the language that was reciprocal between them, altogether assured him that her birth was noble; and if misfortunes had deprived them of exterior claims to respect on the score of riches, yet there were circumstances infinitely superior, in his opinion, that entitled her to homage, and the most profound reverence, — she was at present degraded from the rank she had a right to hold in that great world to which he was yet a stranger.

Such were the sentiments of an unsophisticated heart, who had yet to learn, that

" When smiling fortune spreads her golden ray,
" All crowd around to flatter and betray;
" But when she thunders from an angry sky,
" Our friends, our flatterers, our lovers fly."

That

That few have sympathy enough to seek those whose falling fortunes require the prop of friendship; and still fewer, who by kindness sooth the feelings of the wretched, or meliorate the anguish of a wounded spirit.

Lewis lived in a forest, "far from the busy haunts of men;" he knew, that as in the case of his grandfather, it was possible to be used unkindly—to meet with ingratitude; but he had, with the glow and sanguine hopes of youth, supposed those instances did not abound in the world, but that the good preponderated, and the evil was partial.

With these ideas, natural to an unadulterated mind, he conceived the misfortunes of Hermine gave her additional claims to respect and consideration; and threw him at a still greater distance than even the adventitious

ventitious advantages of high birth and connexions.

Thus feeling, thus thinking, poor Lewis daily swallowed the subtle poison of love; while hopeless, despairing, and wretched, he pined in secret, and in a few short days became only the shadow of what he had been. Ten days had now passed since the grave had received the clay-cold forms of those so dear to the inhabitants of the cottage:—Nor let pride feel indignant if we class them together—all earthly distinctions were no more, and in the silent tomb, the *good* man is superior to the *great*—for riches, rank, and titles there have no pre-eminence.

Though the unprotected Hermine still felt that heart-piercing sorrow no language can describe, it was dignified and reserved. She was become sensible of the pain she inflicted on the good Agnes, and was struck by

by the pensive air, and alteration in the person of Lewis, which his anxious mother feelingly pointed out, adding, "My dear, dear boy, pray take comfort, why should you grieve thus,—tell me, pray tell me if you are ill?—Ah, Lewis, do not break my heart!—My sand glass is nearly run out, do not shake it down before its time, by seeing *you* ill or unhappy." Tears ran down her cheeks.—Hermine started, her face in a glow, and the next moment as pale as death—throwing her arms round Agnes, "My dear good mother do you take comfort, your beloved son is not,—I hope he is not ill."

Lewis was pressing the hand of his venerable parent as his eyes met Hermine's, whose tender glance sent forth a kind enquiry that animated his whole frame, "No, my dear mother," said he, in a voice of energy, "no, I am not ill, but much better than for some time; my spirits have been depressed,

depressed, but, I thank Heaven, I hope to live and see your glass gently decrease many years hence."

Tears and embraces were her only answer, but this scene made a deep impression on their guest;—she saw at once that she had brought all this sorrow and anguish into their house,—happy together till the kind and benevolent Lewis had introduced her father and herself to disturb their repose, and which too probably accelerated the death of the worthy Joseph. "'Tis the contagion of my misfortunes and of my grief," thought she, "that has infected that kind sympathising young man;—it becomes me then to struggle against the appearance of sorrow, to suppress my tears and sighs, that I may not return their charity by saddening their hearts."

The past scene, and those reflections, did more to tranquilize the mind of Hermine

mine than all the cold reasoning of common place arguments, or lessons of fortitude and resignation could have effected. She learnt there was a debt of gratitude that it became her duty to discharge, and that to wound the peace of her benefactors was no less criminal than a repining spirit against the decrees of providence.

"Let my sorrows be buried in my heart," said she, "and let me exert the feeble powers that are left me, to restore the peace of Lewis and his aged parent." She met them at their next meal with a soft composure on her countenance and an air of kindness, and occasionally promoted conversation, by asking a few questions relative to the extent of the forest,—the distance of the convent, of the abbey, and why that noble castle had been permitted to decay and crumble into ruins.

Lewis

Lewis, equally surprised and delighted with the change in her manner, with eagerness satisfied her in such particulars as he was acquainted with.—"As to the castle," said he, "it has been uninhabited, as I have been told, above twenty years;—the wintry storms broke in the glass, and by degrees unroofed the building, so that in a few years the inside got decayed as well as the out.—One thing giving way another fell, the wet rotted the floors, and, for want of props and timely repairs, 'tis little better now than a heap of ruins; only one side towards the west, the tower still remains standing, but its duration will be short, I fear, every storm of wind endangers its safety, and I daily look to see it levelled to the earth."

"Do you not know," asked she, "who were the last possessors, or why the present owner has so entirely neglected it?"

"That

"That castle, my dear young lady," answered Agnes, "once belonged to the master of my poor Joseph; it was there he lived as a steward, and was turned out, as I may call it, by that proud madam.—Ah! she soon ruined him, and I believe he sold it, for after some time another family came to live there.—We knew nothing of them but by report, and that was of very sad wicked doings there, which at last drove them from it too;—and so it was locked up,—the best of the furniture taken away, and the rest left to decay with the building."

"But of what nature were those bad reports against the last possessors, and what were their names?" demanded Hermine.

"Indeed," replied Agnes, "as what happened in the castle was years before we came into the forest, and when we were busy in our own concerns with our farm, I paid but little attention to what was said. Something

Something they talked of, about a lady being brought there, and confined, and never was heard of after, so they would have it that she was murdered;—but God forbid such a wicked deed should have been done! Then they said the place was haunted by the dead lady, and therefore it was that Count Frenanda, or a name something like it, for I have forgot—that this Count and the family shut up the castle, and went away—and so it has gone to ruins,"

"A sad story indeed," returned Hermine, "but I hope not a true one; and as I rested there a few nights without any disturbance from ghosts, I am free to believe the report of a murder done there may be as false as the other."

"I wish to think so too," said Agnes, "for I confess I have oftentimes been weak enough to be terrified when Lewis went there,

there, though Joseph and he laughed at my fears."

"His greatest danger must be from the ruinous state of the building," resumed Hermine, "for the battlements seemed to bend and totter with every gust of wind; therefore it was, that my beloved father sought for shelter in the chapel, as being a little detached from the body of the building we were in less danger.

"Oh!" cried she, clasping her hands in an agony she could not restrain, "oh, how ought I to humble myself in gratitude to Heaven, who directed your dear son to discover our retreat, and caused the last moments of my parent's existence to be passed under your roof! Alas, his prayers, so earnestly addressed to our Almighty Father, that he might not expire till he saw his child in the protection of some benevolent fellow creatures, were heard in a moment

so

so critical, that I have sometimes thought the surprise, and succeeding pleasure to find your family the very beings he wished for, caused a sudden revulsion in his blood, and accelerated his death."

"His appointed time was fulfilled," said Agnes, "and happy it was that he saw you freed from that desolate place. But see," added she, turning her eyes to the casement, "here comes the prating nun, —will you see her?" "Yes," returned Hermine, "I can no longer decline what she means as a civility."

The nun entered, Agnes and Lewis withdrew; the latter with emotions he could not define—admiration, hope, fear, joy, and despair, alternately agitating him. He wished the nun a hundred miles off, and dreaded the influence she might obtain over the mind of this beautiful lady to

induce her to leave them—nor were his fears ill-founded.

She was artful and persuasive. Hermine, unaccustomed to act for herself, delicate, scrupulous,—and knowing that it was the asylum of that convent which her father had intended to obtain for her until the period of her being one-and-twenty—however repugnant she felt it to her inclinations, and though she was inclined to believe that if her father could have had an idea of such a motherly protectress as Agnes, he would have relinquished his intention of placing her in a retirement so gloomy—yet, upon mature consideration, she was not casuist enough to fritter away the spirit of the obligation she felt to adhere to the plan he had formed for her safety, when no longer existing to protect her himself.

Her

Her extreme disinclination to a conventual retirement did not arise simply from the gloom and confinement; a solitary life was her preferable choice, but she had for some years been educated in a convent, she was perfectly acquainted with the artifices and selfish conduct which too frequently governed many, whose ostentatious and superficial piety deluded the credulous, and seduced the ignorant. Nor were the few worthy characters she knew and respected, sufficiently numerous to over-balance the contempt she felt for the many.

But the declared will of her father had met with no opposition.—Compelled to leave her household gods, to become a wanderer, he had told her, he had insuperable reasons for placing her in the convent of St. Ursula, in Ardenne Forest; where, whether he lived or died, he wished her to reside till she was one-and-twenty.

Those reasons he did not chuse to disclose.—She had seen the decline of his health, and was fully sensible it could never be restored, she therefore submitted in silence. His death however was sudden; and she had experienced the kindness of a mother in Agnes, and every hour grew more attached to her.

The nun's expressions at their first interview disgusted — she saw the same selfish principles she had long been accustomed to despise. She repulsed her urgent invitations when she came as delegated by the abbess, yet did not feel she was authorized to refuse them. She wanted time to consider whether having obtained an asylum, she was at liberty to follow her inclinations—she began to fear she was not; and in this doubtful state of mind, rather preponderating to follow the exact letter of her father's declared intention, the nun found her.

The

The time and circumstances were favourable to her views; she addressed Hermine with an air of sympathy and kindness that caused her eyes to overflow—she soothed her without any attempt to interrupt the tribute of sorrow her words had drawn from her eyes—she only pressed her hand, crying, "Good child, affectionate daughter! — Ah! how much does this filial tenderness do honour to your heart!"

Then, when the effusion of grief began a little to subside,—"She hoped a pious resignation to the will of Heaven would teach her fortitude and patience; that a sweet and tranquil retirement in the convent *for a few months*, would harmonize her mind, and compose her spirits. She would find there the tenderest sympathy for her misfortunes, and universal endeavours to meliorate her grief."

This soft condolement penetrated to the heart of Hermine, in spite of her prejudices; but whilst she was hesitating what answer to return, the nun went on.

"Agnes Berthier is a truly good and charitable woman, I have no doubt she would do every thing in her power to console and oblige you;—but she is old, weak, and almost on the verge of her grave—except a small income of twelve louis d'ors that were bequeathed to her, she must live on the labours of her grandson.—My dear child it will not become you to depend upon them."

"No," cried Hermine, hastily, and off her guard, "no, do not think so meanly of me, I can at least reward their kindness for my daily support!"

This was the point the nun had been aiming at, to know if she was as destitute as she seemed friendless; and now her efforts

efforts were redoubled in the persuasive art, to entice her to the convent.

After many tender expressions and insidious compliments to her grateful heart, she added, "with this good Berthier *you might have remained some time,* were not her son Lewis with her; but, as they cannot be separated, it is highly improper and indecorous for a sweet young creature like you, to live under the same roof with a young man like him. The world, my dear child is censorious, and the fame of a young woman, like a tender lily of the valley, soon blighted. The world——". "But what world do you speak of in this forest, my dear mother?" asked Hermine, a little impatiently interrupting her.

"Is it necessary," answered the nun, gravely, "that your conduct should be regulated only by the *number* of your observers?—If one eye, if one tongue con-

demns you — if your own heart cannot justify you, as acting with propriety and delicacy, under your peculiar destiny — surely, my dear child, you will not forfeit self-approbation, nor violate the sacred modesty of your sex, because you are not subject to the censure of a multitude?"

Hermine blushed and trembled.—"No, my good mother," said she, "no, I will never lose sight of self-approbation; and altho' in this case, I am not sensible of any impropriety in my conduct, yet I may deceive myself, and the opinion of others ought to have due weight. I will accept the Lady Abbess's kind invitation, in two days I will accompany you to the convent; though I know it will afflict my dear benefactress here, yet I hope she will do justice to my heart, and see that the separation is inevitable."

The

The nun was delighted, she extolled her to the skies, called her by every endearing epithet she could recollect; and indeed her extreme warmth, rather cooled and disgusted the object of her adulation, who thought she again beheld the hypocritical, sophisticated kindness which so often deluded young people.

"There is one condition I must be allowed to make," said she, "my friend Berthier shall be admitted to visit me whenever she likes; and I also shall be at liberty to come here, should she be incapable of coming to me."

"Doubtless, assuredly, my dear child, who could think of opposing any thing so reasonable, we shall rejoice to see so good a woman. Well, but I must go, our lady is so anxious about you, she will be so happy to become to you a mother. Oh! you have no idea of the felicity you will

enjoy under her protection. In two days, my lovely child, in two days you pledge your word to accompany me to our convent?"

"*I do*," answered Hermine, her eyes cast down, and the words slowly pronounced. Away went the nun, and the victim of her art burst into tears as Agnes entered the room.

Extremely vexed that the composure assumed by her young guest in the morning should again be disturbed, she exclaimed, "Well, I wonder what officious people are good for, to come with their long harangues and their gloomy conversation, on purpose to weary and vex one!—I wish the nun would keep within her walls;—don't be troubled with her, don't see her again my dear lady."

"Alas!" replied Hermine, deeply sighing, "in two days she is to call for me, that

that I may reside in the convent." Agnes had a plate in her hand, it fell to the ground—"To reside in the convent, in two days!"

"Yes, my good mother, yes, I have given my word; all is over, I must leave you, though Heaven knows with what reluctance I shall quit your hospitable cottage."

"But why must you," asked Agnes, a little recovered from her surprize, but greatly affected, "why must you, dear lady, go so suddenly?—What has that prating nun said to occasion a resolution far from your mind this morning? Oh, that I should ever have seen her here!"

"My dear, good woman," returned Hermine, tenderly pressing her hand, "she has taught me to remember my duty; and self-conviction tells me, she has only done her's

her's in pointing out the path it becomes me to follow. But I must confess to you that I shall feel great pain in leaving you."

"Ah! poor Lewis," abruptly and innocently exclaimed Agnes, "my poor boy! why he will break his heart to lose you,—oh, how he does admire and respect you; and I, I love you, as if you were my own child. Dear, dear, I wish that plaguy nun had remained at home, I am sure we did very well before she came haranguing and mischief making.—Now she will have her ends, now she will soon coax you out of your secrets, and know the contents of the leather trunk—oh, how I do dislike such prying, curious people!"

"The contents of the leather trunk," repeated Hermine, surprized and colouring, "what can she have to do with what concerns me alone, or how came she to know any thing of that trunk?"

Thus

Thus urged, Agnes in the height of her indignation, repeated the conversations that had passed between the nun and herself; and gave poor Hermine fresh cause to regret the imperious necessity that impelled her to take up her abode among persons so curious, so very illiberal, and so opposite to what might have been expected in women devoted to a holy life.

"I have no choice at my option," said she sighing, "my word is given, I cannot if I would retract from it; but my engagement does not absolutely bind me as to time, and if I find myself uncomfortable, I will return to you, my dear mother, in defiance of opinion, and be content with the integrity of my own heart."

The mournful tone of her voice set Agnes a weeping; and when Lewis returned from his labour, with a mind dwelling with delight, on the kindness, and restored

stored tranquillity of Hermine, he was inconceivably shocked to encounter the melancholy change that was visible in both faces.

His obvious surprize and emotion were instantly perceived by the lovely cause of it; and unable to bear the explanation she saw Agnes eager to make, she rose and left the room, with a soft glance at Lewis that shot through his heart, and threw him into the greatest agitation imaginable.

His good mother soon relieved him from suspense, with a plentiful store of epithets on the curious mischief-making nun. She related all that had passed, concluding with saying, "that the poor dear young creature was very unwilling to leave them, but that she had been persuaded it was *her duty to do so*; but as she was not to be a nun, she could not, for her part, see what duty was violated by staying with them."

The

The intuitive good sense of Lewis could better understand the nature of the nun's arguments than his mother, who, at her age, had forgot the little points of decorum to be observed between the sexes, if she had ever known them, beyond what natural modesty might have taught her. He at once comprehended that *he* was the obstacle;—and that however inferior they most probably were in birth and fortune, that would not have driven the lady from his mother, had no young man resided under the same roof.

How painful was the conviction that he had nothing to oppose against a resolution that appeared natural and proper;—he could not offer to leave the cottage, his grand-mother never would consent to it, nor would their finances bear to be divided. —Neither would the lady herself permit such an arrangement, he was well assured, —what then must they do but submit.

The

The blow was sudden and severe, it pierced to his very soul; he was shocked at his own feelings, and now first discovered that a violent and hopeless passion would make his future days miserable.

Agnes, who had waited some time for his reply, and had patiently attended to his various emotions, now saw him turn so extremely pale and languid, that starting up she exclaimed,—"Lewis, Lewis, my dear boy, my beloved son! you are very ill indeed. Oh, lady, lady, come to me, come, I shall lose my dear boy!"

Out flew Hermine, little less terrified than the good woman herself; she beheld him pale as death, incapable of speaking, but looking at his mother, and struggling to recover from the violence of his agitations. Fortunately she had some drops in her pocket, these she administered, and very soon recovered him to life and speech.

"Ah!

"Ah! madam," said he, "how good you are, how condescending—but you must leave us, I fear!"—These words escaped from him, he trembled at their effect, for Hermine blushed, was confused, and drew back from the station she had taken, half supporting him, and holding the drops.

The good Agnes, whose whole attention and all her faculties were devoted to him alone, paid little notice to the import of his words in her joy that his speech was restored—nor did she remark their mutual agitations. Lewis, desirous to atone for his temerity, endeavoured by thanks and kind expressions to his mother, to cover the few words he had inadvertently uttered to Hermine; and she seeing him much better rose to retire.

"O, my dear lady," cried Agnes, "Heaven bless you! it was you that restored him

him to me, the worthiest, the most duteous, best-hearted young man in the world. Thank God and you, my Lewis is recovered.—I was telling him the sad news that you were going from us, when he was so suddenly taken ill, that I really thought he was death struck."

"Happily," said Hermine, in a faltering voice, and with her blushing cheeks averted, "he is quite well now;—I dare say he has had more fatigue than usual to day,—he must take more care of himself for your sake."—She left the room, but not before she heard the good woman again blessing her kind heart.

Lewis had seen her emotions, had felt the interest she took in his recovery, with something like transport—hope—and a sentiment undefinable to himself, relative to the state of her mind. But what was he?—a poor wood-cutter, without birth, fortune,

fortune, or education;—how dared he to lift his eyes to one so superior in every respect?—What presumption,—what folly,—could he with propriety entertain the most distant views of her favour?"

"No," exclaimed he, "nor would I wish it—I now clearly perceive the nature of my feelings, I cannot suppress them, but never shall my presumption rise so high as to express them to one so exalted above me. My humble lot may chain me for life to this dreary forest,—whilst my aged parent lives, never will I forsake her.

"And why should I form a single wish to step out of the line of industrious labour, that Providence seems to have chalked for me. If I have been better taught than my companions, it would ill become me to murmur at my situation; I ought from thence to acquire submission and content—I know nothing of the world,

and

and possibly am happier in my ignorance than those who live in great cities—so my good father often told me, and I will believe it."

"Ah! beautiful lady," continued he, with a deep sigh, and concluding his apostrophe, "you were born no doubt to be great and happy, whatever is the nature of your present sorrows; poor Lewis has a different lot to fulfil, he must think no more of you!"

Such was the conviction of a generous mind not yet adulterated by a commerce with mankind. He knew the difference between an elegant, polished young woman, and a labouring wood-cutter, and he could resolve to stifle his too presumptuous admiration; but he could not forget the soft emotion — the compassion that beamed from her eyes, when returning life emboldened him to look at the lovely object who had

had caused those agitations that had overpowered his senses.

"I may indulge in that dear delight, I may dwell on those looks," thought he, "without injury to her or myself, since 'tis a source of pleasure confined to my own heart."

Mean time, while all this contrariety of sentiments passed in the mind of Lewis, Hermine found herself not less perplexed and uneasy.—She had no name by which she chose to distinguish her feelings; she saw only, that however reluctant and dissatisfied she was to enter the convent, and to associate with characters such as the nun appeared to be, curious, selfish, and unfeeling,—yet, there was more danger to be apprehended by continuing at the cottage, and being longer an inmate with Lewis.

"My

"My cruel destiny," said she, "admits of no choice; the will of my dear father must be obeyed, until the time arrives when I am at liberty to open that important packet, and learn where to direct my future steps. I must bear with all the disagreeables I expect to find in tbe convent with patience. But surely neither duty nor decorum can be outraged by permitting the visit of Agnes, and sometimes of Lewis, to whom I owe so many obligations.—No, gratitude and affection for such kindness as I experience, can never be subject to reproach; or liable to be misconstrued by the most rigid observer of my actions."

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

TWO days, which flew on eagles' wings, in the opinion of Hermine and Lewis, appeared to have been eagerly watched for by the officious kindness of the nun; for scarcely had the morning dawned, and its grey mists become visible through the thick trees of the forest, before she presented herself at the cottage, to claim the promise of Hermine.

She had not yet left her chamber, a sleepless night had occasioned a lassitude of

of body, an entire dejection of spirits; and when she beheld the light of day peeping thro' the casement, and remembered that she beheld it for the last time—that she stood engaged to accompany the nun, and to forsake that quiet humble dwelling and its worthy inmates, her sorrow could not be repressed from bursting in torrents from her eyes.

Having indulged for some time in fruitless grief, she grew ashamed of her weakness, and struggled to obtain more fortitude by the consideration that the evils which overpowered her were irremediable; and that the same Almighty Being who had afflicted her, claimed an humble submission to his will, and a patient endurance of those misfortunes which in some shape or other were the common lot of humanity.

Alone and unprotected in the world, at a period when most young women have parents,

parents, brothers, or other relations to protect and guide them,—forlorn and unfriended, she saw the necessity of acting for herself, of calling forth the energies of her mind to support her through the tedious two years in which she was to remain in ignorance of her future destiny;—and also to fortify and strengthen her yet feeble powers, that when the hour for concealment was no more, she might be able to endure and fulfil the duties she should most probably be called upon to perform.

Thus reflecting, her first effort was to rise and prepare for her removal to the convent.—Little preparation had she to make, after combating the reluctance of her heart;—the small trunk, and a parcel of linen not much larger, were all her worldly possessions, and required but a few minutes to arrange. She was not quite ready, however, when the good Agnes knocked at her chamber door, and in a tone of

 despondence

despondence announced the arrival of the nun.

Ashamed to appear thus slothful and indolent, she hastened to finish her packing, and very soon appeared ready to attend her conductress. — When approaching the breakfast table she saw the eyes of Agnes red and swelled, and on throwing a glance upon Lewis she saw his cast down and the deepest dejection pervading his pale countenance. All the resolution she had been endeavouring to assume faded into a sympathy with their feelings; and the little compliment she had been addressing to the nun, died away upon her tongue before she could finish the sentence.

"Ah! dear me," cried Agnes, "this is a second fatal stroke,—now, more than ever shall I mourn for my poor Joseph.— When my dear boy goes to his work who will console me, or lighten the heavy hours

hours I must pass alone?—Dear, good, young lady, how great is my loss—what will become of me to lose Joseph and you too!"

The tears stole down her aged cheeks, and Hermine found all her resolution insufficient to stand against the contagious tenderness of poor Agnes. The nun, not at all pleased with this scene, had some difficulty to bridle her ill-humour, which the tone of her voice betrayed, though her tongue spake words of kindness.

"My good dame Berthier, pray take comfort. Do not call this a separation, you can see the dear lady every day, no one will hinder you, we shall all be glad to see you—it will be a change of scene, the little walk will do you good, and you will soon be reconciled to it."

Before Agnes could dry her eyes and reply, Hermine had recovered from her

first emotion. "There is one way, my good, my kind mother," said she, "by which you may lessen my pain, give ease to yourself, and render my mind easy when I am from you."

"Oh, tell me how," cried Agnes, "say what I can do to give *you* ease and peace, and assure yourself *that* will make me happy."

"Then," returned Hermine, "you must keep Janette with you—I will pay the expence if you will allow her to attend you; but I cannot, *indeed I cannot* leave you alone without comfort, and without a companion. I am both able and willing to pay the small expence of Janette's attendance—and you must not deny me."

"Holy St. Mary!" exclaimed the nun, not at all pleased with this arrangement, "what has she to fear?"

"Nothing,"

"Nothing," interrupted Agnes, "I have nothing to fear, but a sudden call into another world, as my poor Joseph had—and to be alone then would be a sad thing to my poor Lewis. Yes, dear lady," added she, snatching Hermine's hand and kissing it, "yes, I will keep Janette with me; but, thank Heaven, I am able to maintain her, though I adore your goodness to the very bottom of my soul."

"Come, come," cried the nun, "where is the necessity for all this grief and lamentation—why you will not be two miles asunder."

"I am ready," said Hermine, drying her eyes. Lewis took up the trunk and the parcel, without daring to trust his voice to utter a single word. The nun opposed his going, and offered to take the things from him. "No," said he, "no, I will go to the convent." Hermine was

silent—the nun saw he was determined, and gave up the contest, though with a very dissatisfied air.

They entered the thickest part of the forest, where the close and intermingled branches of the tall trees threw a gloom over the narrow path-way that for a short distance wound round them to another small cottage, much inferior to the one they had quitted.

This they passed, and then not the least track appeared to direct the footsteps of any wandering traveller; for rarely did any human being make his way through this almost impassable part of the forest to the convent.—The wild underwood impeded their steps, and with difficulty they preserved their clothes and their skin from being torn by the thorns and briars that obstructed their passage.

Lewis

Lewis looked at Hermine, — her eyes met his, but she was silent; at length she seemed so fatigued, that, in a tremulous voice he presumed to offer the support of his arm. She readily accepted it.—"This is a very unfrequented road," said she to the nun.

"True, my child.—We are no gossipers at our convent, we see but very few persons, and those we do see, come a different way."

"Indeed," said Lewis, "I rather wonder you should strike into this thickest part of the forest, when there is a less troublesome way, though not a very good one."

"Because this is the nearest;—besides, this young lady, I take it, has seen enough of the thorns and briars that rise up in our paths through the world, and where the outset has the most promising appearance,

for her to let the present difficulties affect her—particularly as this is the road to a peaceful abode, where it will be her own fault if she is ever annoyed by briars, or troubles of any sort again."

Hermine shuddered — Lewis uttered a deep sigh, but for a moment neither spake, until the former cried out suddenly, "Ah! how will my late good hostess make her way through these trees?—I shall never, see her!"

"Yes, madam," said Lewis, "I can conduct her through a less difficult road; and though something farther about, being accustomed to the forest, I hope she will not find it fatiguing—and to see you, she will never think the way long."

A sigh was her only answer;—and soon after, descending a pretty deep declivity, she beheld a turret on which stood the convent

convent bell, peeping over the trees, which here were not quite so tall, but resembled a thick wood, in the bosom of which the building itself seemed buried.

A universal trembling pervaded the frame of Hermine; nor were the agitations of Lewis much short of her's. They crossed a bridge that was thrown over a small rivulet, and then turning on the right hand, suddenly stood before the gates of the convent.

"Now, young man," said the nun, as she hastily rung the bell, "now you must give up your charge, and hasten to your labour, which you have unnecessarily neglected to come here;—remember us to the worthy Agnes."

The door opened, she seized the reluctant hand of Hermine, and was dragging her through the gateway.

"Stop, stop," cried the agitated girl, "I will, I must speak; my worthy, my amiable friend," said she, in a voice and with correspondent looks of mingled tenderness and sorrow, giving him her other hand—accept my grateful——" she stopped, then resuming, "tell your beloved mother, she is dear to my heart, and I shall never forget her—and your kindness."

She burst into tears, and ran into the outer court, leaving Lewis a statue of despair, struggling for words, which before they could find utterance, he saw the gates of the convent closed against him.

Overpowered by emotions the most painful he had ever experienced, he returned through the forest, mechanically following the same road; for his mind was too much agitated to direct his steps, until he came to a part of it, which branched off to the spot, where he had left some work unfinished

nished the preceding day. But when he came there, it was in vain he attempted to handle his axe, to resume his labour; he threw himself upon the ground, and "meditated even to madness."

Nearly two hours had the young wood-cutter given himself up to the frenzy of grief and despair, when suddenly starting up, "I will go to the chapel, to the place where I first saw her,—since that hour I have forgotten the castle, its views, and the pleasures I once derived from going on the battlements."

He flew to the castle, explored his way over the broken fragments of the stairs that led to the ruined chapel, and entering it, sat down in the very niche where he had beheld the father of Hermine soothing the sorrows of his beloved daughter.

This

This spot was by no means calculated to tranquillize the feelings of Lewis; he was fixed for some time, and lost in a variety of painful reflections.—"How was it possible they could exist here," thought he, "or for what length of time?" He saw a temporary fire place had been made on the ground, by means of fragments of stone, placed so as to make a kind of chimney, and also that some piles of stone formed two rude kind of seats.

The pulpit was still standing, he went towards it, there were the remains of two cushions,—here possibly they might have crept in to sleep, for he beheld a large piece of old tapestry, which must have been brought from the apartments.

There seemed to be a small closet by the altar, and opening the door, he saw a little basket, in which were the remains of some biscuits, cheese, and a pot with a little

little marmalade—in a corner a very small bottle half full of some cordial, as he found by putting it to his lips.

"Here then," said he, "appears to have been all their stock of provisions, and how they were to have obtained more, seems a mystery, the nearest village being seven miles, and neither in a condition to travel." He then recollected the gentleman had said "they were directing their steps to the convent, or the abbey, when he found himself too ill to proceed."

"How wonderful was the interposition of Providence," exclaimed Lewis, "in making me its humble instrument in an hour so critical; to preserve that lovely tender lady from seeing her father expire in this spot, without a human being near her! Oh, she never could have survived the shock of such an event under such circumstances!"

While

While he was thus examining, he saw something lying by the steps that were round the altar, which though in a corner, had the appearance of being silver. He hastened to take it up, it was a tooth-pick case, of silver much ornamented, and in the inside of the lid were engraven the arms of a family, with the initials under it of H. L. M.

Lewis was transported, he had no doubt but that this trinket belonged to Hermine, and his first thought was to return immediately to the convent, and deliver it to her.—But after looking at it some time, and indulging in the dangerous delight of recalling to his mind every word, every look of this too lovely young woman, he felt an irresistible impulse to keep it a few days in his possession; that he might often look at a trinket, which had been held in the hand of an adored object, now alas! shut out from his sight—perhaps for ever.

This

This reflection was agonising, he kissed the case a hundred times, put it into his bosom, resolved not to mention it to his mother, and then slowly quitted the castle; taking with him, the basket, and the bottle, as sacred memorials of its owners, that should not fall into other hands.

Hermine, mean time had run through the outer court, and entered a small parlour, followed by the astonished nuns, and there she gave way to a burst of tears so violent as to terrify her companions.—But her conductress to the convent, who could well account for the excess of her grief, made them a sign to withdraw for refreshments; and then taking the hand of her victim, she called her by a hundred tender names, and soothed her with such an appearance of affection and sympathy, that poor Hermine began to struggle for more composure, and to repress her emotions, that she might not seem ungrateful to

to kindness, nor inattentive to the civilities of the nuns, who brought to her confections, cakes, and cordials. Her spirits and her strength stood in need of them, and she took some of each with a grateful air, and a little compliment that pleased them.

When somewhat more composed, her conductress, whom they called Sister Marie, demanded if she was ready to attend the Lady Abbess? To shrink from an inevitable evil she well knew would be a folly, and to defer the introduction could avail her nothing; she therefore signified a readiness to accompany her, that no less surprised than delighted Sister Marie, who without delay, led her to the parlour, where the superieure sat in state expecting this desired visit.

Hermine could not help trembling as she approached her; she was for the present

sent the arbitress of her fate, and she scrutinized her countenance with an earnestness that for the moment suspended every other idea. The abbess though displeased with her ardent gaze, felt evident astonishment at the beauty and elegance of person this young woman possessed, so far exceeding what she thought an exaggerated report from the nun.

Recovering from her surprize, she welcomed her in the kindest manner, and with many endearing epithets. But Hermine was no stranger to conventual language,—the air ill disguised of haughtiness, the look of protection, which implied the magnitude of her obligations for being admitted into the convent, did away all the sophisticated kindness her words meant to convey; and the unfortunate orphan in this first interview was but too well prepared what to expect, when novelty, and assumed sweetness of manners, would wear off, and

the

the mask drop from the artificial covering of selfishness and hypocrisy.

This first visit presently terminated to the relief of both parties, for the Lady Abbess was little less disconcerted, than Hermine was mortified, by the scrutiny she had made; and her attempt to read the heart through the medium of the features. Sister Marie delivered her to the care of Sister Therese, to shew her her apartment, and initiate her to the customs of the house. She returned to the abbess.

"Who can this extraordinary young woman be?" said the venerable lady, "I protest I never beheld so lovely a creature; but she has an intrepidity of look, an eye so searching, that she seems to penetrate through the veil that covers the heart, as if she was determined to read what passes there.—I protest I never was more disconcerted than by her fixed gaze; and had I not

not a conscience void of offence, and devoted to our holy religion, I should fear that girl more than I can express.—Who *can she be?*"

"Holy mother, I cannot learn, 'tis an impenetrable secret—she is certainly of rank, her every look betrays nobility of birth—and I am greatly mistaken, if she be not rich also; but what are the circumstances that have driven her late father and her to this forest, or why she obstinately refuses to disclose their family name, is a secret you only, holy mother, have a right to oblige her to confess."

"We shall see, we shall see," returned the abbess, "certainly there should be no concealments from me, but common methods will not do with her. She is an extraordinary young woman, yet she may be understood by and by—we must proceed slowly, her's is a disposition I can already see,

see, that will wrap itself up in reserve by precipitate enquiries; you must steal gently into her confidence,—but what proofs have you that she is rich, or where can those riches be?"

Sister Marie then related that on a former visit to her, she had said with a haughty air, — she could pay the good Agnes for every kindness she received from her;—"And only this morning," added she, "she insisted upon the old woman's keeping a girl with her, at her expence, she would pay for her."

"Aye, aye," said the abbess, "that's a proof indeed, and yet when you first saw her she made out as if she had neither friends nor money.—Yes, yes, there is a profound secret I see, and we shall discover it some day."

"'Tis

"'Tis all concealed in a little red trunk, I believe," returned the nun, "in a very small compass, though indeed, 'tis pretty heavy for its size. I just lifted it, but the officious Lewis snatched it from me, and she gave it to the porteress when I brought her to attend you, holy mother, and I'll warrant has reclaimed it fast enough before now."

"Well, well," answered the lady superieure, "we must not be impatient—I shall see, I shall see what can be done with her."

Sister Marie withdrew, but not with satisfaction.—"She hated mystery for her part, and she thought *her* kindness merited confidence." And to be the first to develope a secret, was one of her chief delights;—nor could she forgive Hermine for making her of so little consequence. Nothing less than the gratification of her curiosity

curiosity would have induced her to persevere in bringing her to the convent, and she determined not to relax in her endeavours to penetrate through the veil this young girl threw over her name and circumstances.

Hermine, mean time had been conducted to her apartment. No novice as to the accommodations in a convent, she was neither surprised nor disgusted by its miserable and sombre appearance—though she regretted the loss of that small but comfortable chamber at the cottage, where the kindness of its inmates more than compensated for the deficiencies of accommodation—whereas here, she had no such consolation to expect.

Sister Therese observing that she cast a melancholy look over the room, said,—"My good child, do not be discouraged by the gloom of this little apartment, use will

will soon reconcile it to your feelings; and I trust you will meet with some kind hearts in this house, that will make you indifferent to trifles like these."

The voice of the nun was soft and harmonious, Hermine turned to look at her, her countenance was still more interesting. "I thank you, good mother," replied she, "I have no right to be fastidious, and this room is in unison with my feelings; for I am the child of sorrow, and melancholy has marked me for her own."

Her looks were but too correspondent with her words; the nun was moved with compassion, for her's was a gentle heart, without guile, and open to every tender and humane impression.

"Take comfort, my dear child," said she, "beware of despondence, Heaven tempers our strength to our trials; exert the

the reason and fortitude implanted in every bosom to resist despair, nor weakly bend under the tide of ill fortune. A patient endurance, and the exertion of those powers with which you are entrusted, will lead you to that reliance on the goodness of Heaven, which must ensure your future peace, and in its own good time, bring you happiness, by turning evil into good. The infliction of misfortunes are generally intended as salutary lessons, to guide its children in the paths of religion and virtue—to teach them, that a firm trust in Providence must be productive of peace here, and eternal felicity hereafter."

The mind of Hermine was but ill-disposed just then to pay much notice to trite observations, or profit by lessons of morality; but the voice, and the resigned placidness of the nun's features, were so correspondent to the tenor of her advice, that she was irresistibly drawn to lend her attention,

attention, and even to derive a momentary consolation from precepts that *seemed* illustrated by example. She was about to reply with some degree of kindness, without giving an entire confidence, when they were suddenly broke in upon by Sister Marie, and as she entered the other withdrew.

In proportion to the favourable opinion she had began to entertain for the one, her disgust and dislike to her first acquaintance encreased; nor could all the kind epithets and artful blandishments of Sister Marie, obtain from Hermine any return, but cold civility, and a studied reserve. The intelligence given by the good Agnes Berthier, of her unwarrantable curiosity, had steeled the heart of her intended victim against the prying duplicity of the nun; and defeated all her well planned schemes for obtaining the much desired confidence.

Provoked by the cold reserve so insensible to her adulating kindness, she was thrown off her guard.—" I must tell you child," said she, " that pride and sulkiness will meet with no encouragement in this holy retirement;—the vile passions common in a world replete with wickedness, must here be subdued.—Sorrow that results from affliction will meet consolation, and obtain comfort;—but a perverse, untractable disposition, rejecting kindness, and insensible of its duty, of humble submission to Heaven, and its delegates upon earth, can expect no favour from either.

" I must also tell you, that ingratitude is an unpardonable sin: That you ought to remember, to *me* you are indebted for this happy asylum; to my compassion, for your miserable forlorn state, you are solely beholden for your reception here;—and in short, that I have a right to expect confi-

dence,

dence, gratitude, and the affection due to a generous benefactress."

She had run herself out of breath—her volubility and passion had deformed features naturally not pleasing, and the expression darting from her eyes, terrified poor Hermine into a fit of trembling that took from her all power of speech.

The nun saw her disorder, and made her advantage of it;—if insensible to kindness, she might be wrought upon by fear.

"Yes," continued she, after taking breath, "yes, to me you owe every good you can hope to obtain.—I have saved your soul from sin, rescued you from perdition, preserved you from being criminal, —residing with a young man, and open to the delusions of your own heart, and the temptations of a designing youth, which would soon have drawn you into the gulph

of destruction.—All this I have done, and for who?—For what?

"In the first place you are a nameless being; and let me tell you, nobody conceals their name and birth, unless they have cause to be ashamed of both.—And as to the other, what is my reward? Sulkiness, reserve, and ingratitude,—when a contrary behaviour would engage my regards, and obtain the tenderness and care of even motherly protection.

"If you can reconcile your conscience to this behaviour, 'tis well for you.—I have only to lament my affection is thrown away upon an unknown, and perhaps, an unworthy object.—In one word, you may find me a good friend, or risk the consequence of my displeasure, as you please.—My power here, *you will find,* is not inconsiderable."

As

As she pronounced the last word, she dashed out of the room, with the air of a fury,—and left Hermine almost sinking on the floor; overcome by the poignancy of her own feelings, and the violence of this worthless nun.

The distraction of her mind was at length relieved by a copious flow of tears.—" Oh, my father!" cried she, " to what a state is your suffering child reduced,—deprived of her only blessing, the dear protection of a parent. That mysterious silence imposed upon me, no doubt, from causes equally just and kind, here subjects me to suspicion and insult;—and the same command has torn me from compassionating hearts, to reside with selfish, rigid, hypocritical beings, who are strangers to real tenderness—and will daily aggravate my misfortunes, by cruel reflections, and undeserved malignity, because I am unhappy, unprotected, and must be unknown.

"Oh," added she, clasping her hands in agony, "I foresee a thousand persecutions, that my beloved father never could intend should befal me, when he commanded me to reside here!"

This poor creature was still overwhelmed with anguish, when she was summoned to the refractory, and introduced to the company at the table.

There were only ten boarders, though the house was very large; and when Sister Marie said "They were very full, and very poor," she had not adhered to truth, for they had plenty of accommodations. And though the convent was by no means rich, yet neither was it so poor, as to impede the exercise of charity, or cause them to refuse an asylum to the unfortunate.

The truth is, they were avaricious in the extreme; the abbess and a few of her favourites,

favourites, enjoyed every luxury,—and however they preached abstinence and moderation to others, in their little private circle, no such precepts had an effect upon their practice.

Sister Marie was one of the happy few, who were admitted to the sanctorum of the abbess; and when Lewis sent off for assistance, she was deputed to reconnoitre the object, and judge whether she could be brought there, with any advantage to the convent.

At first it may be remembered she hung back, "they were so very poor,"—but when the proper dignity and spirit of Hermine rose upon the word "charity," so often used, she began to change her ideas and language, and her report to the abbess was, that "she had the air of a princess, was assuredly of high birth, and she believed by no means so destitute, as

she was at first led to believe.—It was not credible, that she should be wholly without connections, and if she had any, the convent might be benefitted by them.—At all events, if they found her likely to be on their hands, there were many ways to get rid of her."

It was then determined that she should be received; and Sister Marie anticipated the pleasure of creeping into her confidence, and possibly partaking of what *little* advantages were in her possession.

With such views, and with such hopes, no wonder the good lady forgot the assumed piety, humility, and graciousness, that had appeared, as she believed, to be the leading features in her character.

There was an air of dignity in the young Hermine, that when disposed to reserve, or feeling dissatisfied, had the semblance of pride

pride to those who were unacquainted with the sweetness of her disposition; and this semblance had acquired strength in its feature, from the dislike she had conceived to the inquisitive nun. Her cold civility was therefore so strongly marked, as entirely to overthrow the ingratiating plan of Sister Marie; and in the resentment of the moment to unmask her character to the terrified girl in a light, that for ever after rendered her odious, and an object of equal terror and dislike.

When Hermine was seated at the table, every eye was directed to her face, which was clouded by the deepest expression of melancholy, and her eyes were yet red with weeping.—Some there were who felt compassion and sympathy, though they were strangers to her story, but simply considered her as placed there a boarder like themselves.

Two of the young persons seemed to be nearly of her own age. She looked round on all as they addressed her, but only one countenance had any thing attractive to engage a second survey;—this one struck Hermine from the harmony of her features, and a serious cast of countenance, as if she had ill health, or an uneasy mind. She fancied there might be some similarity in their situation, that might produce a reciprocity of regard; and if she found herself disposed to seek for a companion, this young lady bid fairest to be the object of her choice.

When they arose from their dinner, Hermine was again ordered to attend the Lady Abbess, who, recovered from her first surprize, and stimulated by the too curious nun, had undertaken to talk to her, first with kindness, and if that proved unsuccessful, then to inform her of the authority she held over every one in that house; where

where no person presumed to have a will of their own independent of her.

Hermine saluted her respectfully; she was desired to sit, in a voice of kindness, and some confections were offered to her. The venerable lady entered upon a long harangue against the sin, and the folly of indulging unrestrained sorrow for irremediable misfortunes.

She rung all the usual changes that consoling people generally adduce, to prove they know much better in theory than in practice, how to subdue grief by dint of argument;—for never yet could a lacerated heart be cured of its wounds by the voluble tongue, or cold inefficient reasoning of indifferent persons.

She then adverted to the uncommon good fortune, (the effect of Sister Marie's warm prepossession in her favour) which had

had conducted her to an asylum, where uninterrupted peace and harmony universally reigned in every bosom.

This, and much more, was said in praise of her house, and of Sister Marie's goodness of heart; adding in a tone of pity and affection,—"Though you have no longer a parent, nor, as I understand, a relation upon earth, which is a very strange circumstance I must say — yet, my sweet child, you may find a mother in me, *if you wish for it*; nor shall you experience any difference in the respect and countenance you will receive in this house, than if you paid for your board equal to the first person in it."

The face of Hermine betrayed the different emotions of her mind during this long and complicated harangue. When she talked of the folly of grief, for being left an unprotected orphan, her heart swelled

swelled almost to bursting; and the tears that flowed down her cheeks evinced the inefficiency of such modes of consolation to talk down sorrow, whilst she was painting her wretchedness in glowing colours.

As the good lady proceeded, she felt a variety of sensations according with the subject that produced them; but the conclusion of her long and tedious homily, surprised, hurt, and offended her.

"I know not," said she, "from what circumstances, madam, you have drawn your conclusion that I am unable to pay for my board, or had the least idea of intruding upon the *charity* of your house. I have not indeed, as yet, enquired into the terms which is expected for me to comply with, but it is certainly my intention, and, thank Heaven, fully in my power, to pay for every accommodation I may receive here."

The

The abbess, though agreeably surprised, and deeply skilled in the art of disguising her feelings, could not conceal an air of confusion that overspread her countenance at the unaffected dignity of manner which accompanied those words; nor could she immediately frame an answer, till a little recovered she fell into her accustomed habit of flattery.

"My sweet child," said she, "I have simply misunderstood your situation, not from information, but hearing only the melancholy circumstances attached to you; and judging from the obscure place in which you were found, that some heavy calamity, some pecuniary embarrassments, must have driven your father to this remote forest, with a young creature of your delicacy, and without any attendant. Judging from these appearances, you must allow, my dear child, that my conclusions were certainly very just."

"I

"I beg your pardon, madam," returned Hermine, with a deep sigh, "your inferences were certainly very just."

This short sentence was very unsatisfactory — affecting concern therefore for the sigh which could not be suppressed, she said, "My sweet lamb, I am charmed with your candour, no less than I am grieved for the sorrow that oppresses you. Look upon me as a tender mother—open your heart to me, give me your confidence —be assured your secret will rest as safe in my bosom, as if confined only to your own."

This request roused Hermine from some painful retrospections. — "What confidence is it you claim, madam," said she, "and what secrets do you expect me to reveal?"

The good lady, a little disconcerted, replied, "Why, my dear child, I am unacquainted

quainted with your name and rank in life; you must be sensible 'tis not common to receive persons within these holy walls without recommendation, and ignorant of their name and character."

"I thought, madam," returned Hermine, coldly, "that being unfortunate and unprotected, were sufficient claims upon a religious house and its benevolent inmates, to encourage a well-founded hope of being received into it. But permit me to observe, that I was invited, urged to come here, I did not solicit it;—though I will frankly confess, that it was my beloved father's desire that I should reside in this convent for some time."

"Indeed," cried the abbess, taking notice only of the last words, "then doubtless he had reasons—he must have known, or been recommended to me."

"Of

"Of that I can say nothing," answered Hermine, "I never presumed to enquire his motives for the preference.—Possibly, its vicinity to the Abbey of St. Hubert was his principal inducement, for there he intended to reside, had it pleased Heaven to have spared his life some time longer to his unhappy child.—But he is happy! and I kiss the rod that has afflicted me, with humble submission."

She stopped a moment in great emotion; the abbess waited in silence expecting her curiosity would now be gratified, but Hermine presently added, "This, madam, is all the confidence I have to place in you—what relates solely to myself, my name, birth, and circumstances, rest in my own bosom, and cannot interest others. As a boarder I wish to be considered; but if under these existing circumstances, you feel any reluctance to admit me as such, if I am to be subject to unworthy suspicions,

cions, or mortifying reflections,—then, madam, I do not conceive that I am bound to remain here, or intrude upon your confidence, if I cannot obtain your favourable opinion."

The abbess, surprised, awed, and humbled, by the spirit which this unknown, friendless girl exerted, was for some moments at a loss for words that might not betray her feelings; at length she said, "Heaven forbid, my dear child, that I should refuse an asylum to you under such circumstances, were you as poor as you are friendless, particularly when it was chosen for you by your late father. You don't know me, you cant read my heart, and you are right in your reserves; such strength of mind in so young a woman does you honour—yes, my love, I approve highly of your prudence. *I* am far out of all idle curiosity, 'tis only when I can do good, and prove my charity and benevolence,

volence, that I ever concern myself with temporal affairs, or interest myself in the concerns of others."

This speech so thoroughly disgusted Hermine, that with a low curtsy she was quitting the room, when the abbess cried, Holy St. Ursula protect you, my child!—keep your own secrets from prying curiosity—depend upon my love and motherly protection!"

Hermine made a slight bow with her head. "Yes," said she, mentally, "I shall most strictly observe your injunction, my good lady, to the very letter of it, which will effectually exclude *you* from any participation of those secrets."

From that day she made it her business to read faces, and study characters—it diverted her mind from continual sorrow and many painful retrospections; it was only at nights

nights that she felt them press hard upon her, and there on her pillow she freely indulged her tears, regrets, and terrifying apprehensions for her future destiny.

Nor was Lewis and the good Agnes forgot, they had constantly a share in her meditations; and the image of the former obtruded oftener than she wished, because accompanied with pain for his situation, so unworthy of his merits.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

THE departure of Hermine had thrown a gloom over the mind of the good Agnes and her dear Lewis that all their mutual efforts to console each other failed to disperse. The circumstances that bound them in affection were so tender, and of so melancholy a complexion, that not a single moment was she absent from their thoughts—nor could Agnes ever pardon the officious nun for enticing her from their cottage.

"To

"To be sure," said she, "this was a poor place for so sweet a lady—for a lady she is by birth, one may see by her air, and by her graciousness, disdaining to be proud to her inferiors; but I am sure she would rather have been here, had not that false, prating, curious old woman coaxed her away. And now I have lost my good Joseph too, and here I am left a burthen upon my poor boy, who is too good, and too sensible to be confined in this forest in the prime of his days, attending upon me."

These reflections constantly occupied the mind of the worthy Agnes; in vain did Lewis assure her he was content with his situation, that his chief happiness was centered in contributing to her comforts.

"No, my son, no," said she, "it cannot be that your youth should be wasted in this dreary place. The good priest, the dear young lady; both told me your understanding

standing was superior to your situation—my own reason tells me, you ought to go into the world and study your interest.—Whilst your good grandfather lived I had nothing to say, for he was more helpless than myself—he would have broke his heart to have been parted from you."

"What then," demanded Lewis, "do you love me less than he did?"

"Oh, no," replied she, pressing his hand, "no my dearest boy, Heaven knows you are my only blessing this side the grave—but I love you better than myself!—Joseph is in Heaven, there is now but one to maintain, my twelve louis d'ors a year are enough for me, with this cottage and garden, quite enough; here is a good girl that will live with me, I have neighbours who respect me, the dear Mademoiselle Hermine will not, I am sure she will not forget or neglect me; and indeed, indeed

I cannot answer it to my conscience, that your spring time of life should be wasted, when I have enough to satisfy all my moderate wishes."

Scarcely had Agnes spoken the last words, when the priest entered, and to him she instantly appealed, repeating all her former arguments, which he immediately seconded with great warmth.

"My dear mother, my good father," cried Lewis, "what right have I to throw myself out of a line in which I have been brought up, to labour for my support?—Supposing that by the instructions of my worthy grandfather, and the example of my no less worthy mother, I am better informed than my companions, will these very small advantages avail me any thing in the great world, where I am unknown, unfriended—what am I fit for, what employment can I procure?—only servitude."

"Servitude!"

"Servitude!" exclaimed Father Francis, "no, my son, not servitude in the light you mean. Listen to me, I know your capacity, I have a regard for you, I do not like to see a young man of your natural abilities thus lost—had you an holy call, an inclination for a religious life, I should greatly rejoice; — but you have decided against that, and I will not importune you —all men should be free in their choice."

"God bless you, father," cried Agnes, "for your liberal way of thinking."

The priest resumed — "Give up your employment, put yourself under my tuition; I will engage soon to qualify you for a tutor, and I have friends yet in the world to whom I can recommend you. Once placed in that line, I fear not your future fortune. Your good mother is right, she has enough for *her* frugal wants; and you shall reside under my care."

"Oh," cried Agnes, "you are the very best of men!—Surely never was any body so fortunate in a friend! — Dear Lewis, you cannot hesitate."

"Do not think me insensible to your kindness, my good father," said Lewis, "but the idea of a tutor in me, it would be folly to encourage."

"By no means," returned the priest, "you are unacquainted with your own capabilities, because your powers have never been drawn forth; but I have long observed the seeds of genius, waiting for the genial warmth of friendship and instruction, ready to burst forth, with an assisting hand to remove the rubbish off the surface that prevents its expanding into life and action. In one word, trust yourself with me; and if, after three months study, you are fatigued with my lessons, and pine to return to a wood-cutter's employment,

ployment, I promise you to restore you to your mother, to the forest, and to your present favourite implement, the axe."

Father Francis spoke the last words with a smile. Lewis, deeply impressed with the good man's kindness, requested one night to reflect on his own propensities and feelings, and the next morning he would attend him at the abbey.

This request met with no opposition.—Agnes clasped her hands,—"Good gracious," said she, "how the dear young lady will rejoice!—Many times she said to me, "how unworthy is such an employment as cutting wood, for so sensible and amiable a young man as your good Lewis." And then she would sigh, sweet creature! And when I told her how good he had always been to labour for us, "Heaven will reward his filial gratitude," said she,

"his heart and mind would do honour to a king."

"Oh, mother!" cried Lewis, trembling with delight, yet confused at such unmerited approbation, as he thought it.

"I protest, my son, those were her very words, and it was hearing them, that encouraged me to express my own thoughts; for I always saw how you improved, and how much you excelled all your companions."

"Pray, dear mother, say no more, you will ruin all;—if you teach me to be vain, all improvement is at an end."

"True," said Father Francis, "and to change the subject, let me tell you, that yesterday I received a message to attend the young lady newly entered in the convent. I made all haste to obey her—we had

had a private conference—in good truth, she seems an excellent young creature."

"Oh, I knew it, I knew it," cried Agnes, "she is the best of human beings! —But go on, father."

"Well," resumed he, "she enquired what expences attended her late father's funeral. She said, her mind had been too agonized at first to think of her obligations to our charity, but she wished now to discharge them. I told her, no part of the expences would fall upon her — it was placed to a general account of house expences, and I could give her no further information. It must not rest so, she replied, and she should make application to the superior. She thanked me most graciously and kindly for the little services I had done, and pressed me much to accept of a present from her. The first, her kind thanks, I received with pleasure, but

presents were useless to me. She then insisted I should bestow two louis d'ors on any poor family that wanted it. I took the money and shall perform her bidding. I wish, I confess, to know who and what she is—'tis plain she is not so very poor as we thought, and indeed as she seemed at first to say she was.—You know nothing more of her?"

"No," replied Agnes, "all I know is, that she is goodness itself—that she has been unfortunate, and is unhappy. I never presumed to ask questions, because if she has secrets of consequence, they concern only herself, and ought to be sacred from the curiosity of strangers; if they could do any one good by being told, I am sure she would conceal nothing."

"Indeed I am of your opinion," answered Father Francis, "I am myself a little attached to her; not more by the misfortunes

misfortunes that seem to have overwhelmed so young a creature, but from an ingenuous air, a frankness of manners, that speaks a good heart.

"Father," said she to me, when I refused her present, "I am an unhappy orphan, and there is a mystery attached to my situation that I cannot divulge; but let me not suffer in your good opinion by my silence. I see that already in the convent my situation excites curiosity, and possibly I may have to dread malignancy and contempt—the first I will not provoke, the last I will not bear; for in certain cases, and in particular circumstances, I look upon myself as a free agent."

"I allowed the propriety of her sentiments; and assured her with truth, that she might call on my services whenever they could be useful to her. Such was our conversation; and I left her with en-

creased regard and respect to what I felt for her when here, when under a calamity so heavy as few young people are called upon to support—the sudden death of an only parent, among strangers, and in a country unknown to herself."

The emotions of Lewis, during the priest's relation, were almost ungovernable; his heart was ready to burst with grief, doubt, and terror, lest this amiable young creature should be persecuted and ill-treated in the convent, the consequence of which might be her quitting the neighbourhood.

He could have embraced the good father for the justice of his observations; and charmed to find that she beheld him as a friend, he resolved to hesitate no longer in resigning his own destiny to the friendly wishes of a benevolent man—a man who could have no interest in serving him, but

but the pleasure of cultivating his mind, and enabling him to emerge from the mean and laborious employment in which he had passed so many years.

That night which Lewis had required for deliberating on the kind proposal of Father Francis, was passed less in deliberation, than in raising a structure of fairy happiness that intoxicated him with delight, and threw a veil over every possible impediment to his visionary felicity.

But when the morning dawned, and the excess of his transports suffered a little abatement—when looking round his humble chamber, he was brought to reflect on his birth and degrading employment, the change in his ideas were as instantaneous as they were mortifying.

"What madness has possessed me this night, to indulge in such delightful dreams

of bliss as never can be realized!—The flattering kindness of the good father has already had a fatal effect on my weak intellects, since, for a single moment, I could forget the immeasurable distance placed between me and the adored object of my reverence."

He was thoughtful for some time, then he said,—" What avails my giving up an employment I am accustomed to, a line of life for which I seem destined, and am, or at least, *I was,* contented with?—And if I have sometimes indulged my fancy in wandering through the busy scenes of the great world, of which I know nothing but from description—still I had no ambition beyond the humility of my situation.

" *Now* my head is confused, my mind restless, my heart oppressed;—am I then qualified to study?—Can I pay attention to the good father's instructions, when all my faculties

faculties are deranged? — And to what purpose should I study?—can I ever attain a situation to raise myself from obscurity?—would even success, and fortune, ever remove the insuperable barrier between the beautiful Hermine and the low-born Lewis?—Oh, no!—fool as I have been this night to flatter myself with impossibilities; my reason, my very adoration forbids even a wish that she should be degraded by a connexion with me.

"Her favourable opinion was simply the effect of gratitude for the little services she received here; and the sweetness of her disposition produced those tender glances, that compassion for my sudden illness, which transported me beyond the bounds of reason. Ah! did she know my presumption, could she believe it possible I should ever have indulged such vain, and fruitless hopes as I now shrink from, how would she despise my temerity; how quickly withdraw

withdraw that favour and kindness which is now my only solace for lost happiness.

"No," cried he, abruptly leaving his room, "I will not study. In this forest I will vegetate all my life, my leisure hours shall be passed in the old castle; there I may think on the only object that can ever occupy my mind, without my presumption being known, without any absurd attempts to be more than what Providence designed me."

Thus determined, Lewis appeared before his grandmother, whose excessive joy, and sanguine hopes of her son's future prosperity, had so entirely occupied her mind as to preclude sleep, and even to render her insensible to the want of it. But when she looked up, in return to his customary salute, the expression of *his countenance* returned the warm blood to her heart, which

which in a moment before had flowed joyfully to her cheeks.

"My dear Lewis!" exclaimed she, unable to say another word.

"Let us take our breakfast, my dear mother, I will then tell you the result of my reflections this night."

"Dear gracious!" said she, "you frighten me by your grave looks. Ah! my son, I fear you are not so sensible as you ought to be for the kindness of Father Francis. If you refuse his offer out of consideration for me, you will not only make my days miserable, but cause me to wish for death, to relieve you from a burthen that binds you to a laborious and comfortless way of life."

Lewis, exceedingly agitated, not more by her words, than by the alteration in her countenance,

countenance, instantly endeavoured to explain his sentiments, and declared, that the resolution he had taken was the effect of deliberation—an act of choice independent of her, and resulting from a truer estimate of his abilities, than either his dear partial mother, or the good father, was qualified to make, from the trifling advantages he seemed to possess over his companions.—He concluded with saying, he never would *forsake her.*

Agnes had fallen back on her seat, her hands and eyes lifted up, with every mark of sorrow and disappointment working on her features; while he affected to busy himself at the breakfast-board.

At length starting up, she exclaimed, "Since you will not be guided by our advice, and think so meanly of yourself, dear, dear Lewis, let me beg and entreat you to go with me to the convent—let me tell the

the story to that dear Mademoiselle Hermine—she is goodness and truth itself, I am sure she is, and has wisdom too, more than we can have—let her opinion and advice determine between us."

Seeing by the countenance of her son that this proposal greatly agitated him, she urged and enforced her request in such strong and affectionate terms, that he found it impossible any longer to resist the ardency of her wishes, and agreed to attend her.

She was now in raptures; the morning repast was hurried over—she got Janette to assist in making "her look decent for a visit," which, independent of her son's interest, she was very solicitous to make. Lewis doubted her strength for so long a walk, but she would listen to no such objection.—"Good-will, my dear son," said she,

she, "can do much, and I am sure my ability will second my inclination."

He had no more to oppose against this good-will, and they set off at an early hour, each engaged by their different agitations. For though both languished to see Hermine, the desire of Agnes sprang from affection, unmixed with any painful apprehensions, "as she was quite sure, in her mind, that the dear young madam would join her;" whilst Lewis, conscious of his feelings, blushed at his presumption, and feared, as much as he wished, to see her—knowing that he was only by every fresh view adding to his unconquerable passion, and encreasing his difficulties and regrets.

Poor Agnes long before she reached the convent, was sensible that powers will not always keep pace with inclination.—She once or twice exclaimed, "What a length of

of way!" Another time, "Dear gracious, why we shall never get through this thick wood!" But to the questions of Lewis, if she was not much fatigued, she resolutely answered "No," though at the same time almost sinking to the earth—and when they did arrive at the convent, and were ushered into a small parlour, she was so overcome, as to be obliged to have drops and water.

"I told you, my dear mother,"——"Well, what signifies," said she interrupting him, "here we be at last, and that makes amends for all."

Hermine that moment flew into her arms,—"My good, my dear mother, how I rejoice to see you!" Agnes pressed her to her bosom, unable to speak for her tears, which Hermine gently dried with her handkerchief, saying, "Oh, what trouble you have taken; such a length of way for you to walk!" then turning to the inanimate Lewis

Lewis, she held out her hand, "My good friend, how happy I am to see you; how many obligations have I to your dear mother, and yourself!"

Lewis respectfully bowed upon her hand, but he spake not a word; his tumultuary emotions impeded articulation. Nor was *she* perfectly at ease; a fluttering of her heart, and the blushes on her cheeks, as her eyes met his, obliged her to turn quickly to the good Agnes, who, now a little recovered from the fatigue of her walk, and the pleasure of seeing her dear young madam,—opened the business which lay near to her heart, appertaining to Lewis.

She repeated the priest's offered kindness, her own earnest wishes, and then the folly of Lewis, in declining to oblige them, adding, "he will make me not only unhappy while I do live, but render me impatient and sinful—I shall wish for death, and

and cease to take any thought for myself, from knowing, that 'tis to attend and cherish me, that he refuses to give up an employment, because it adds to our income; or quit the forest, while I am alive."

Lewis much affected by the tenderness of his grandmother, begged to be heard. He then briefly recapitulated all his objections, arising from a conscious sense of the inferiority of his abilities, and the loss of time that must follow a trial, before his good friend, Father Francis would be convinced of his insufficiency to profit by his intended kindness.

"Well, now dear lady," cried Agnes, impatiently, "you are to determine between us; your good sense can understand Lewis better than I can, and you are so kind and humble, as to say you love me, therefore we both agree to submit to your judgment and pleasure."

Hermine

Hermine was greatly surprised, and not less pleased, that so fair an opportunity offered for Lewis to emerge from his low situation, and laborious employment, and to improve his natural talents, which she thought very highly of. Tho' by no means, she observed, qualified to judge decidedly on his abilities, from her own want of knowledge and experience, yet, as her limited judgment was sanctioned by the good father's, she ventured to say, it was her opinion he ought not to refuse such offered advantages, as might, most probably be of infinite service to him, and in no one point of view, could be injurious.

"Your estimate as to loss of time," added she to Lewis, "I must be allowed to think is erroneous. I am persuaded those hours dedicated to receive instruction from the worthy priest, will be profitably employed; and be productive of much future benefit to yourself, and pleasure to your friends.

friends. The difficulties you urge, spring from a too humble sense of your abilities, never yet called into action. And with respect to your mother, you may see her every day if necessary; and do you believe that she will be permitted to want any such additional comforts as *your labour* might procure for her? No—be assured she shall not; her wants are circumscribed, and she has a friend who will supply them."

"Ah! madam," cried Lewis, "you are too good, too bountiful, and much too favourable in your opinion of my humble abilities;—but I promised that your judgment should direct for me, and I no longer oppose the generous kindness of the good father, since you have decided that I ought to accept it."

"Far be it from me," replied Hermine, confused and blushing, "to arrogate any right to myself to decide or direct against your

your own feelings. I simply express my ideas, which, though they correspond with the wishes of your mother, and the advice of your friends, by no means should be conclusive to influence your conduct, if your heart absolutely revolts against the plan, seemingly, and intendedly calculated for your benefit, you have an unquestionable right to *decide* for yourself."

"My heart, madam," answered Lewis, "will never presume to revolt against judgment like your's, and the ardent desire of my friends united,—not a shadow of an objection remains; I submit implicitly to be guided by the direction of the good father."

"Thank God!" cried Agnes, clasping her hands passionately, "thank God, my long secret wishes will be gratified. You know not, my dear Lewis, how often and often, my poor Joseph and myself regretted your

your laborious and obscure life,—but what could we do? Now all is right, blessings on the worthy priest; Heaven surely inspired him in your behalf."

The transports of Agnes equally surprised Hermine and Lewis, the latter was greatly affected. "Dear mother," said he tenderly, "whatever may be my future destiny, never will I prove ungrateful to your affection, and anxiety for my welfare."

This point settled to their mutual satisfaction, Agnes made a hundred enquiries relative to the accommodation of her young friend. To these she answered with reserve, but with an intended air of contentment; for to complain was unavailing, nor did she choose to detach the mind of Agnes from the pleasing contemplation of Lewis's promised advantages.

The

The young man, however, who had watched the expression of her countenance, and the visible effort to appear satisfied with her situation, felt a secret pang at his heart that instantly overspread his countenance with sadness, not unobserved by Hermine; who addressed him with words and looks of such kindness, as presently to revive Lewis, and for a moment obliterate every idea but of her captivating powers over his mind.

At length it became time for Agnes and her son to tear themselves away. The visit ended with reluctance on each side to separate, but the imposing laws of the house broke up their conference—and after repeated farewels, and many assurances of mutual regard, Agnes had turned towards the door, wiping off the tears she could not suppress, Lewis reluctantly following, when suddenly turning back, smote by an impulse of internal feeling, he with trembling

bling hands drew the much valued tooth-pick case from his bosom, and with a sigh and desponding look, said, "I believe, madam, this trinket was your's, I found it in the chapel."

Hermine had marked his agitation, and the place from whence he took it. With a blush, and a gentle smile, she repulsed his offered hand, and said, "It was mine, but if you will accept of a toy so inconsiderable, you will do me a favour by keeping it."

"A thousand, thousand thanks!" exclaimed he, passionately kissing, and as hastily replacing it, "never will I part with it, whilst I have any existence!"—Then bowing with reverence, he rushed after his mother.

CHAP. VII.

HERMINE, on leaving the parlour, was met by the young lady who had engaged her attention, when first introduced to the community; and whom she had constantly viewed with encreasing regard, tho' she never had been fortunate enough to hold any converse with her, from the jealous attendance of Sister Marie, who constantly watched all her motions.

As

As they saluted each other, the agitations of Hermine, raised by the transports of Lewis, caught the eye of the young novice; for such she was, and within a few months of being professed.

"Are you not well?" asked she in a soft voice. "I am not ill," answered Hermine, "but a little affected by parting with a worthy, good woman, who loves me, I believe; and to those who like me, are deserted and friendless, an affectionate heart is an inestimable treasure, and cannot be left without occasioning a very sensible regret."

"I am exactly of your way of thinking," answered the novice, "the value of a good heart is incalculable.—But are you, indeed, deserted and friendless? Ah! what a similarity in our situation! But you are from France, I am from England—a country,"

exclaimed she, tears dropping on her cheek, " I shall never see more!"

Hermine extremely moved, had just taken her hand with a sympathising look, when the officious, watchful nun appeared.

" Holy St. Mary! what is all this? tears, melancholy, embraces?—A fine scene this truly!—Go mademoiselle Hermine to your chamber;—and you," said, she, in a furious tone, to the trembling novice, " do you follow me; I must come at the bottom of this tender comedy."

The spirit of Hermine rose indignant against this impertinence;—" how," said she, in an elevated voice, " is it criminal in this convent, for one young woman to shew civility to another? On what account are we to be prohibited from common conversation with each other when we casually

ally meet, and thus to endure insult without having given offence ?"

"The Lady Abbess will answer your insolent interrogatories," replied the enraged nun, "and to her, you may refer yourself." Then seizing the arm of the trembling, shrinking novice, she almost dragged her thro' the cloysters ;—and left Hermine surprised, provoked, and excessively grieved, to have been the cause of such rough treatment to the poor young lady, for whose fate she already felt much interest—whilst her dislike to the convent, and disgust to the unfeeling, insolent, and hypocritical Sister Marie, was considerably encreased.

She did not, however, go to the abbess. She had already witnessed on several occasions, the influence this woman had over her, the perfect coincidence of their sentiments, and the good understanding

between them.—She was sensible she had nothing to expect from her justice, or interference; and she detested her affected kindness, and the duplicity legible in every word and action.

She saw that the burning curiosity constantly displayed to unlock her heart, and to become mistress of her secrets, being as constantly repulsed by an encreased reserve on her part, had made her an object of suspicion, hatred, and jealousy.—For it was evident, that the sisters and boarders had all been interdicted from any private conversation with her; as she never till this hour had been a single moment alone with either the one, or the other,—the constant vigilant nun, closely following her steps, both in the house and gardens.

That a young English lady should be sent to the Ursuline Convent in the Forest of Ardenne, to take the veil, appeared to Hermine

Hermine a very strange circumstance; and she was already assured by her tears, and affecting apostrophe, that the intended sacrifice to a monastic life, was by no means the preferable wish of the unfortunate novice, but the effect of deplorable necessity, or cruel compulsion.

She was slowly walking along the cloysters, her heart deeply interested on the object of her meditations, when she was met by Sister Therese, whose sweetness of manners had engaged the polite regards of Hermine, superior to any she had bestowed on the abbess, or any other of the sisterhood.—"You seem to be disturbed and afflicted, my dear child; take courage, your misfortunes of whatsoever nature they may be, are not yet irremediable. Observe my advice, appear cheerful, and counteract suspicious ill-will. Possibly I may visit your chamber some evening—mean time be discreet and obliging; the

effort will cost you little, and may essentially contribute to your peace."

Before Hermine could reply, she darted out of sight, and presently appeared her former tormentor. "I expected that you had gone to your chamber," said she, "who is it you wait for here?" Hermine, tho' provoked, at the same moment recollected the words of Sister Therese, and mildly answered.—"I neither wait for, nor expect any one, it was simply for exercise that I walk here; nor was I sensible of any impropriety in the indulgence—but your intimation shall be obeyed," and bowing her head, she took the way to her apartment.

Equally astonished and delighted, by this unexpected mildness, and apparent submission, the wary sister congratulated herself, on having, at length, subdued the haughty

haughty spirit of this proud, friendless orphan.

"Aha!" exclaimed she triumphantly, "severity, I see, is the method to bend an obstinate heart; that simple novice has told some dismal tales, that have terrified her companion, and my well-timed exertion of power over the trembling girl, has had its proper effect here. Well then, my little dear, I shall not fail to improve your fears, until you find it your interest to trust me with your dearly cherished secrets."

Thus delighted in the contemplation of her own successful management, and anticipating the charming confidence she must one day obtain, she resolved by a proper mixture of authority and graciousness, to establish the idea of her power and consequence, in the mind of Hermine; that she might feel how much it was for her interest to make a friend of Sister Marie.

Mean time Hermine had retired to her chamber, not a little gratified by the kindness of Sister Therese; and greatly interested for the young English lady.—But neither the one nor the other dwelt upon her mind like the recollection of the parting scene with Lewis.

His transports agitated and confused her—her feelings were undescribable;—she blushed, she was pleased. Yet pain was equally mingled with pleasure, and conscious pride revolted against the dangerous indulgence of being gratified by his too visible admiration and tenderness, when she considered his situation, and her own.

"Yet," said she, involuntarily sighing, "both gratitude, and a just estimate of his good sense, and affectionate heart, justifies me in being interested for his happiness, and the cultivation of his mind.

"I

"I may, and do lament, that he is low-born,—that he has been accustomed to the mean employment of wood-cutting; but surely there can be nothing reprehensible in feeling pleasure, that the natural abilities Heaven has blessed him with, should be improved; and a possibility afforded to him of emerging from his very obscure situation, to a more decent and reputable one. No, certainly, there is nothing blamable in my pleasurable ideas on that head; 'tis a sentiment I owe to the kindness I have experienced from him and his good mother."

Having reconciled herself on the nature of her feelings, by placing them as a debt due to gratitude, she did not choose to investigate too closely into the motive that induced her to resign the tooth-pick case to the repository from whence she had seen it drawn; or the emotions she could not suppress, on beholding the extacy with which he replaced

placed it. It was all the simple effect of gratitude on both sides; and who could condemn a sentiment so laudable?

'Tis thus that young minds, unhackneyed in the insidious arts of the world, too often deceive themselves, by encouraging their early prepossessions as a tribute to reputed merit; and simply as an act of justice due to virtues and accomplishments, which exist sometimes only in their own imaginations.

Hermine saw not her danger, because early in life, she had been taught to distinguish between nobility of birth, and the immeasurable distance the lower class of peasantry were thrown from their haughty lords.

Pride of birth, and contempt for low and vulgar (synonymous terms in her vocabulary) people, had been instilled into her mind, by the injudicious, servile attendants of

of her younger years; by the elevated rank of her father; and still more confirmed by the adulating civility she had experienced in the convent, in which she was placed; where the high price, and handsome presents made by her father, to the abbess and nuns, had procured her a flattering distinction, extremely dangerous to a young and undiscriminating mind.

Happily Hermine had received from nature a sweetness of disposition, that in a great measure counteracted the effects of an ill-judged indulgence, in a preference so gratifying to youth.

She felt her own consequence indeed, and supported the dignity of high birth; but if sometimes she appeared to be too haughty, she was never insolent. Good humour, an affectionate heart, and a benevolent wish to see every one happy, tempered the apparent distinction her manner seemed

seemed to claim; and tho' she was never familiar, the lowest person in the convent might command her good offices, if sick, oppressed, or unhappy.

Thus she was generally beloved for her generosity and beneficence, at the same time that she was an object of envy; and many were but too sensible of an unjust distinction that mortified others, and ought never to be given in a public seminary of education,—where an undue preference to birth and riches, assuredly gives rise to the most baneful passions, and is commonly followed by the most fatal effects.

It creates and nourishes pride, vanity, insolence, and idleness. It engenders hatred, malice and envy,—it deadens every desire of improvement,—it mortifies the ingenuous feelings of a sensible heart,—it gives a check to vivacity,—and is a death-blow to emulation;—for where is the incitement

citement to study, or excel, in undiscriminating youth, if rank, and wealth alone obtain praise and attention?

But to return—the education of Hermine having thus given her high ideas of birth, and the importance annexed to rank and titles; not even the misfortunes of her family, nor her forlorn, unprotected state, had in any shape rendered her forgetful of the distinction she had been accustomed to claim and receive.

At first, when overwhelmed with the weight of her sorrows, when sinking under the irreparable loss of a dear and only parent, among strangers, in an unknown part of the country, ignorant even if she had the means of subsistence, or what would be her destiny,—no wonder if in such an eventful moment, the pride of birth, and all worldly honours faded from her sight; and threw her dejected and humbled under the

the rod of affliction, that so severely wounded her tenderest feelings. But we have seen, that though tremblingly alive to the kindness of Agnes and her son, her native superiority of mind rose indignant against the ostentatious, much vaulted charity, of the selfish, deceitful nun; and the dignity of her manner, occasioned a total change in the language of the latter.

This pride, and this spirit, now came to the aid of Hermine, to curb the indulgence of the warm approbation, of the tender sentiments, that had stolen unnoticed into her soul in favour of Lewis.

She felt a little alarmed on the first discovery of the favourable impressions he had made on her mind, *for her heart, she was sure, was perfectly free*; but having once reconciled the nature of her feelings, to the laudable and spontaneous effusions of

of *gratitude*, she grew entirely satisfied with her self-delusion, and found that it would be the height of *in*-gratitude, were she to be less anxious for his future advantages, of which he was every way so deserving.

So readily do young minds deceive themselves when following the ignis-fatuus of inclination, and so easily impose upon their own judgment, when inexperience is added to the ingenuousness of their hearts, unenlightened by a knowledge of the world; or if, still more unhappily, deprived of a dear and tender mother, the best and safest guide for female honour and happiness.

Poor Hermine had early lost the invaluable blessing of a mother's care. She could look back with a painful recollection of that dear parent, who used to press her to her bosom, and shed floods of tears over

over her.—She remembered the dreadful period when she was torn from her arms, and left her apparently dying.—She still shuddered on recurring to that day when she was told that she had for ever lost her; the impression was indelibly stampt on her mind—but time had meliorated sorrow, and the tenderness of a father had long since restored her serenity, though it had not blunted her memory.

Hermine being at peace with herself in regard to Lewis, turned her thoughts on her own situation. The advice of Sister Therese had a momentary effect when she so quickly met the inquisitive nun; but when she was alone, so great was her dislike to that woman, and so incapable did she feel to shew her any submission, or civility, beyond what respect for herself demanded, that she was angry at her own meanness, for temporizing with her insolence.

"No,"

"No," said she, "I detest duplicity—I cannot treat her with respect, or apparent complacency; all I *can do* is to keep from her, and when we must converse together, to resolve upon being coldly civil, and to guard against purposely offending her."

That evening, when she supposed the whole community were retired to rest, and she had been passing several hours in painful retrospections, the convent clock told the late hour, and she prepared to undress herself. She had scarcely began when a soft rap at her door made her start, but having no weak fears to intimidate her, she cautiously opened it, and beheld Sister Therese. "My good mother," said she, "this is kind indeed."

"Go into bed, daughter," whispered the nun, "and I will talk to you the mean

mean while." Hermine prepared to obey, and Sister Therese proceeded.

"From the first moment I saw you, I felt a prepossession in your favour, and pity for your situation, which I had accidentally heard described to the Abbess in the worst colours. As it appears that you are bound to reside in this convent for two years, I am very desirous that you should pass that time as comfortable as possible." Hermine was going to speak, with a look of acknowledgment,—"Be silent, daughter," continued the nun, "and hear me.

"The Lady Abbess has only been our superieure about two years. Her predecessor was an angel when on earth, for she had every virtue that a human being could possess. She was a Frenchwoman of noble birth, but that was her smallest claim to our respect and love; she was adored by all who knew how to appreciate her

her goodness and saint-like virtues—she was respected and feared even by those who were incapable of imitating her.—Alas, what a change! but 'tis our duty to bow in submission to the will of Heaven."

Here the good nun told her beads, and crossed herself devoutly, then resuming her discourse, said,—"Our present superieure was elected from another convent, and was permitted to bring three nuns with her; both circumstances an innovation to the rules of this house, but the will of the bishop none could dispute.

"Of these three nuns, Sister Marie is the chief selected confidant, and her power is nearly equal to that of the abbess; in truth, the latter is chiefly influenced by her intrigues.

"It has fallen in my way to know that you have disobliged that powerful nun; and

and I am grieved to say, she is severe, malicious, and revengeful. These are bad passions, my child, even among the inhabitants of a dissipated world; but in a religious house they are intolerable, and greatly to be dreaded.

"You must not enquire how I came by my information, 'tis sufficient for you that I am fortunately acquainted with the designs against you."

"Designs against me!" exclaimed Hermine.

"Daughter, be attentive.—They are determined to develope your secrets—they have found, that wrapt up in reserve, you appear equally insensible to kindness or reproach. It is now resolved to carry things with a high hand—to intimidate you under such pretences, as they are never

ver at a loss for here; for who dares question, or dispute the will of the abbess.

"Unhappily, you informed them that it was the desire of your late father that you should remain here. This is laid hold of as a plea to detain you, whatever cause you may have to wish for a removal—they will not allow you to be a free agent. And I understand that you are to have a conference with the abbess to-morrow, when an entire confidence will be demanded by an authority from whence there is no appeal. If you refuse, a certain small trunk of your's will be immediately sent for, and the contents examined without reserve, and, possibly, kept safely—for you."

"Good Heavens!" cried Hermine, "is this a religious retreat?—'Tis surely the abode of deceit and persecution!"

"Hear

"Hear me out," resumed the nun.—This conference is to take place to-morrow after coming from the refectory, for so I learnt this evening. In the morning Father Francis will be here, he has humanity, and is a pious man; I think, I am sure he will be your friend. At ten o'clock he visits us; do you be in the way, request to speak with him in private—he will not refuse, nor can even the abbess deny you the privilege of speaking to the holy father.

"If you have any papers of consequence, or valuables you wish to have unseen, seal all up, and solemnly give them to the father in trust for you, without expressing any doubts, or fears, relative to the abbess, or in any shape implicating me; for my punishment would be severe indeed, were it known I disclosed their secrets, nor would you be exempt from suffering.

"Adieu,

"Adieu, my child, I can stay no longer, consider me as your friend,—as a friend to the fatherless.—Do not provoke the malice of your enemies, bear, and forbear; civility costs nothing, be firm, but gentle and respectful—so will you defeat the evil designs against you.—Farewell, may you rest safe in the protection of Heaven."—She then softly glided from the room, and left the astonished Hermine to reflect on her friendly communication.

She saw however, that no time was to be lost; that action, not thought, was requisite to disappoint the illiberal designs of impertinent curiosity. Flinging herself out of bed, she huddled on her clothes, and taking from the important trunk, the sacred packet of her father's, with some other papers, and things of consequence, she sealed them all up in one parcel, marking them as her property, and as a sacred deposit in the

hands of Father Francis, to be reclaimed and opened, only by herself.

She also wrote a few lines to Agnes, telling her what she had done; and requested her to inform Lewis, and also to preserve her letter, as a corroborating proof of the trust she committed to the good priest. She felt rather confused when she had written this letter. It implied a distrust of Father Francis; yet she thought amongst such artful—selfish people, she was justified in taking every precaution suggested by Providence.

This business compleated, she returned to her bed, but rested very ill; and was up and watching for the good father, long before he made his appearance.

She began to grow very restless and impatient, when luckily as he entered, only two nuns were passing, and she hastily brushed

brushed up to him.—"I wish to speak to you, father, immediately." He looked surprised at her agitation, but waving his hand, followed her to her chamber.

She had no time to spare.—"You behold an unfortunate orphan, who in the sight of Heaven, claims your compassion and protection; my rights are sacred to your holy order, and I rely implicitly on your faith and justice. In the presence of that Being, who is a father to the fatherless, and the great judge of mankind, I commit this parcel to your trust, to remain in your care thus sealed, and unseen, till I demand it from you again.—What say you, father?"

The astonished priest awed by the solemnity of her address, and the singularity of the circumstance, was for a moment speechless; but recovering, he took the parcel with one hand, and placing the

other devoutly on his bosom, with his eyes uplifted, said,—"In the presence of that Holy Being, I here solemnly engage to preserve this sacred deposit only for you.—Yes, daughter, such is my confidence in your honour, truth, and good principles, that I scruple not to receive this charge, and pledge my faith for its safety."

"Heaven will reward you," said Hermine, "and from henceforth let me reckon upon you as a parent, and a friend. Be silent in this convent as to the trust I have reposed in you; and believe, my good father, that I will justify your confidence, and deserve your protection."

"I will not question it," returned he,—she then gave him the letter for Agnes, and was gratified by hearing him speak warmly in favour of Lewis. But he had no time to stop, he wished to conceal the parcel from observation, and that was a difficulty

culty that had not occurred to her; for it could not be put in his pocket, or concealed unseen under his cloak.

She had told him that imperious necessity compelled her to give it out of *her possession*, that *very morning*;—he had no way then but to conceal it under his cloak, and go back immediately to the abbey, as having a necessary duty to perform, which would take him but a short time, and he should speedily return.

This account satisfied the porter; and as his following Hermine had been unnoticed, the excuse passed current, without any observation from others.

When their usual repast was over, Sister Marie with an air of assumed consequence, bid Hermine attend the Lady Abbess.—She could not suppress her emotions at the expected order, and the nun seeing her

agitated, was not a little pleased that her haughty spirit seemed to be subdued. With a malicious smile she led the way, whilst Hermine mentally blessed the good nun who had prepared her for this unpleasant interview, and prevented the hoped for success from their nefarious schemes.

The Lady Superieure received her with all possible dignity, though she affected an air of affability and protection in returning her salute.

"Be seated, my good child, it is my wish to be considered by you as a tender parent;—as a mother in whom it becomes you to place a perfect and unreserved confidence. Add to this, that it becomes not the dignity of this house to admit an inmate of whose name, family and connections, we are entirely ignorant." She paused, Hermine continued silent, and she proceeded.

"Do

"Do not mistake me, 'tis by no means requisite that the whole community should participate in your secrets, 'tis sufficient for them, that *I* can pronounce my entire satisfaction in these points—that you communicate to me (to a mother, *entitled to be the repository of your private history*) every event of your life and circumstances, down to your strange residence in that ruinous castle, and happy reception here; where you may promise yourself uninterrupted quiet and happiness for ever—assuredly for that period you were commanded by the sacred will of a father, to remain in this blessed retirement.

"Speak, my child, speak, enable me by your candour and confidence, to silence the murmurs, and refute the malicious observations your strange story has, I have no doubt, drawn on you very undeservedly." —This long harangue effectually disgusted Hermine.—With a firm, but respectful

manner, she replied, "It was the *wish*, the *intention*, of my late ever-beloved father, madam, that I should reside in this convent, *not a command imposed upon my obedience*; yet a wish once expressed by him, had with me all the force of a command to determine my choice."

"No doubt, my good daughter,—you judge perfectly right; a single wish of a parent should be held sacred, and indisputably obeyed."

"I have ever considered it in that light, madam, and therefore it is, that I am compelled, both by duty and inclination, to refuse every explanation that may tend to disclose my name and circumstances. Until I arrive at the age of one-and-twenty, the communication required of me, shall never pass my lips; and even at that period, I do not promise my confidence, for I must be guided by circumstances.

stances. And, as you, madam, justly observed, that unqualified obedience was due to the will of a parent, *you, I am sure,* must approve of my reserve, when I assure you, I strictly obey the commands of mine."

Never was poor lady so disconcerted, so disappointed and mortified, as this dignified, artful abbess. To have the tables so completely turned upon her—to have her own opinions, her own words, retorted to strengthen that reserve she had intended to overthrow by affected kindness and studied sophistry—to be thus humbled by a *girl,* rendered her for some minutes incapable of speaking.

Hermine thought to take advantage of her silence, and rose to withdraw, making a respectful curtsy. This act of reverence recalled the attention of the abbess, who had just given way to the emotions of rage and malice she could no longer suppress.

"Stop, return," exclaimed she, in a voice of thunder, and ringing the bell violently, which brought in Sister Marie and two others of the junto, "resume your seat, mademoiselle, you shall not be disobedient; neither will I be kept in ignorance of what it becomes me to know. Do you, Sister Marie, go to this young person's chamber, and bring from thence every thing that belongs to her; and do you, mothers, remain at the door to prevent her from going out." Then turning to Hermine, "From compassion to your apparent distress I omitted a customary duty, that of having your trunks and apparel looked over; now I shall most certainly make the scrutiny—and you may too late regret the opportunity lost, when you might have made a friend of me."

Sister Marie returned, and with a look of malice, said, "By my truth, this trunk is considerably lightened since it was brought

brought from the wood-cutter's;—it was not for nothing that old Agnes hobbled here, I believe."

"What, is it empty?" asked the alarmed superieure.

"No," returned she, setting it down, "not empty, but I remember it was *plaguy heavy* when it first came here. And as to apparel, there is no great matter of that, only decent necessaries;—there is all I could find in her room, and I tumbled her bed up too."

The native pride of Hermine shone through her sparkling eyes.—"By what authority," said she, "do you take these liberties with me? as a boarder, my chamber is an apartment no one has a right to enter into, much less presume to search, without my permission, which I assuredly shall never give *to you*."

"It

"It was by my authority," answered the enraged abbess—an authority indisputable in this house, and extends to every chamber, as well as over the conduct of every person entrusted to my care."

"*I*, madam," returned she, "was not entrusted to your care, I voluntarily entered here as a boarder; and my residence in this house depends upon myself."

"We shall see that," replied the haughty superieure, "mean time I demand from you the key of this trunk."

"Without acknowledging *your right to demand it*, madam, I will open it before you, and you may satisfy an unwarrantable curiosity in my presence."

She immediately produced the key, unlocked the trunk, and threw back the lid. The abbess hastily drew out the contents. There

There was a quantity of very beautiful lace, some exceeding fine cambric, a small case with three elegant diamond rings, a pair of small brilliant ear-rings, a superb pocket book with gold instruments, a piece of beautiful embroidered cambric for a dress, and a large purse which contained upwards of two hundred louis d'ors, "A sum," said Hermine, indignantly, "a sum sufficient to pay for whatever accommodations I may require in this house, or I should not have entered it, after hearing such lamentable complaints of *its poverty*."

"Poverty!" repeated the abbess, "whoever, mademoiselle, was impertinent enough to tell you that this convent was poor, uttered an abominable falsehood."

"Very possibly it might be an untruth," returned Hermine, coldly.—"But now, madam, I presume that I may take back my property to my own apartment; where, henceforth

henceforth no one shall take the liberty to intrude but the person appointed to keep it clean."

"I must first ask you," said the haughty lady, "whether you have not *more* property than is now displayed?—in one word, whether you have not lightened that trunk of some things of value since you came into this house?"

"I disdain a falsehood," answered Hermine, "though I may well be excused, should I decline to answer a question so unjustifiable; but I frankly tell you, madam, that since my residence in your house, I have deposited in safe hands some papers and other things of much consequence to my future prospects."

"And why should you have judged such a step necessary?—Could those important

portant papers be any where so safe as in your own possession, and in this house?"

"You must pardon me if I do not think myself bound to account for my motives for acting as I have done, and beg leave, madam, to withdraw." She then hastily replaced the contents of the trunk, took it up, and with a polite curtsy, left the parlour.

We shall not repeat the conversation that took place between the enraged abbess and the malicious Sister Marie. They concluded the deposit must be in the hands of old Agnes and her officious son, and determined to break off the connexion; whilst Hermine retired to her apartment, not a little gratified that she had thus disappointed and mortified the insatiable curiosity of the nuns.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

AGNES and her son turned their reluctant steps towards the forest, both much affected by leaving Hermine; and equally filled with secret emotions of joy, though the causes were different.

Agnes was delighted that the judgment of her young friend had determined Lewis to accept the protection of Father Francis; a plan so often wished for by herself, and her good Joseph, though hopeless of effecting

ing it, from their slight acquaintance with the priest, and the encreasing weakness of Joseph, that required his constant attendance to support his aged grandfather, and comfort his drooping wife.

The long wished for object being now attainable, gave such spirits to Agnes, that she was insensible to the fatigue of her body, till arriving at the cottage, she dropt into the arm chair completely exhausted.

The mind of Lewis was wholly occupied by the image of Hermine, the sweetness of her countenance, the lively interest she had taken in his concerns, and above all, the kind air with which she permitted him to keep the precious little trinket, once in her own possession,—all these agreeable reflections had kept him perfectly silent, and nearly insensible that his good grandmother leaned upon his arm.

When

When she sunk back in the chair, Lewis, was restored to his recollection, and wonted attention—some of her cordial spiced wine soon recovered her, and then both burst forth in praises of the good young lady. —Agnes was sure she had added seven years to her life.—" I may yet live to see my Lewis a great man,—I am but *sixty-seven*, Joseph was *seventy-nine*, and now my heart will be at ease; who knows but I may live seven years longer?"

" God grant, my dear mother," said Lewis, " that your life may be spared to see the utmost extent of those wishes fulfilled, that are really necessary to your happiness.—But moderate them, I pray you, in what concerns me; only be assured, that if I am not successful in proportion to your hopes, at least I will never prove ungrateful to them—I may fail from want of abilities, but never from want of diligence and good-will."

" No

"No," cried Agnes, earnestly, "no, you will not want abilities, I know you will be the pride of my old days;—and I shall live to see you what you ought to be,—better, far better than a wood-cutter."

Lewis smiled, but made no reply, *his hopes* were not so sanguine, but he would not deprive her of indulging in her own castle-building fabric; and therefore set about making the necessary preparations for his residence at the Abbey of St. Hubert.

The following day, whilst Lewis was instructing Janette in all her duties for the comfort of his grandmother, whom he was to leave after their dinner repast, they were agreeably surprized by seeing Father Francis enter the cottage. "I bring you a letter," said the good man, "I have been with your young friend at the convent."

"A

"A letter!" exclaimed Agnes, "good gracious, why we seed her yesterday,—my heart misgives me sadly,—what can she write about? Here, Lewis, open it, my fingers shake with fear."

"Do not be alarmed," said the father, "I left her well, and I dare say you will read nothing to give you pain."

Lewis had hastily looked it over. "Oh, my good father!" cried he, with strong emotion, "you are the friend and confidant of that lovely lady. Heaven be praised! she has a friend, and that friend is you."

"Why dear heart, Lewis, what is all this, tell me all about it? Why you are transported, I think; what good has happened to the dear lady? Why sure we are her friends too, I think."

Lewis

Lewis delivered the letter, and the father related the events of the morning; at the same time observing, that he had placed the parcel in a secret repository, which should be known only to Lewis and the lady herself, having labelled it as her property, for fear of accidents to himself.—"And that repository," added he, "is in the chapel."

Agnes was much pleased, that their curiosity was baulked,—and still more, that through the good father, she should often hear from the dear unfortunate young lady.

Lewis prepared to accompany Father Francis; he was regularly to call on his dear mother twice a week, and if she wanted him, Janette's father was to bring the message.

Agnes, when he took leave, with the tenderness of true filial regard, felt at the moment a pain at her heart that checked the

the exultation of her mind, tho' it did not enfeeble her hopes; but the unbidden tears would flow, and prevented the articulation both of her blessings, and her sanguine expectations. She wrung his hand, and ran back into the house, taking up Hermine's letter, that it might have the effect of a cordial to renovate her spirits.

Lewis silently walked by the side of the good father, revolving on the past, and the present.—He resolved on diligence and perseverance, and to the will of Heaven he referred the rest, with the same sentiment as Portius expressed.—

"'Tis not in mortals to command ſucceſs,
"We may do more,—endeavour to deſerve it."

Whilst Lewis entered upon a course of study, that every hour enlightened his understanding and improved his judgment, Hermine found *her* situation daily grow more and more disagreeable, from the eternal

eternal watching of Sister Marie, who seemed her very shadow, and prevented her from holding the least conversation with the English novice, or the good Therese. The latter had paid her one more nocturnal visit, and given her much good advice, calculated to make her patiently bear with her present discomforts; but Hermine was not of a disposition to submit uncomplaining to the disagreeables and indignities she met with. She saw no one whose manners attracted her regard, or who seemed to have a heart congenial with her own, but the young English lady; and she was determined by some means to obtain a free intercourse with her.

Several fruitless attempts were made by both parties, the constant Sister Marie was forever at their elbows—neither coldness, reproofs, or sarcasms had any effect to turn off her vigilant attendance. The endurance

endurance of Hermine was at an end, she was tired and provoked beyond measure; and one morning, while the resentful fit was strong upon her, she demanded an audience of the abbess.

We are very generally apt to realise our own wishes—the good lady thought the hour was come, when an unreserved confidence would plead for future indulgence, for being permitted to cultivate the friendship of the interesting Fidelia. She already anticipated the completion of her own desires; at the same time she was studying for the most evasive duplicity to counteract the secret wishes of Hermine.

When the young lady entered, her form erect, her colour raised, and an air of dignified resentment pervading every feature, the good lady was thrown out of her play; and when she stiffly bended to her salute, was at a loss whether she should appear gracious

gracious or haughty. Hermine soon unfolded herself. She was sufficiently acquainted with the imperious tenacity always observed when any points were discussed before the superieure of a convent, whose word was fate, and from whence there was no appeal,—she founded her plan on a different ground—interest, she was well assured, secretly influenced every decision, and every action, and from thence she hoped to derive the accomplishment of her wishes.

"I come, madam," said she, in a firm voice, "to inform you, that it is my intention to leave your house. I obeyed the *wish* of my father in coming to it, but it never was his wish that I should endure such ill-treatment as I have borne here—such as I will no longer submit to, and therefore I intend to leave you next week."

The Lady Abbess was thunderstruck! the determined air and words of this haughty young woman, had put to flight all her assumed consequence; but whilst she was struggling for words to answer this unexpected declaration, her indefatigable friend Sister Marie appeared. A little encouraged by such an auxiliary, she resumed her natural haughtiness,—"You will leave my house," said she, "you complain of ill-treatment—I don't understand you, mademoiselle—what ill-treatment can you have met with from any one here?"

"Aha!" exclaimed the sister, "what is the young lady making complaints—presuming to remonstrate, and threatening to leave that holy asylum for which she is indebted to kindness and benevolence?—Very pretty this indeed!"

"'Tis to the abbess I address myself," returned Hermine, with a contemptuous look,

look, "and 'tis of your officious attendance, and impertinent conduct that I take the liberty to complain—or rather I should say, to assign as my motives for leaving this house; for complaint is unnecessary, when we have the power of escaping from the disagreeables that annoy us."

Rage, malice, and every vindictive passion was legible in the countenance of the nun; but a look from the abbess suppressed the torrent ready to burst forth. That wary lady perceived from the encreasing firmness of Hermine, that lenient measures were more likely to succeed with a spirit like her's than harshness. The sum she had settled to pay for her board was too convenient to be easily relinquished. —The terms on which she was received into the convent were known to Father Francis, who, though a warm friend to the community, and a *little tinctured* with curiosity, was yet a man of piety, of bene-

volence, and integrity. He seemed much interested for the unfortunate orphan, and would doubtless interfere in her behalf, if applied to. Besides, there was the troublesome old Agnes, and her officious son, now under the protection of the father;—all these persons might make some bustle if any harsh methods were adopted, or if they attempted to restrain her by force.

Every one of these considerations passed rapidly in the mind of the abbess, who, after exchanging a few significant looks with the nun, thought it expedient to adopt a change of measures; like many other directors, who wisely give up their opinions, and resign their power, when they are no longer enabled to support it with their usual consequence. The great lady mildly said,—"Name your grievances, daughter, express freely the extent of your wishes.—St. Ursula forbid that I should deny to you any

any indulgencies compatible with the rules of our holy house."

"I request then to be freed from the attendance of Sister Marie; she is not to my taste, I can dispense with her company."

"How! not to your taste,—you are nice indeed. And pray why am I not to your taste, ungrateful as you are!" exclaimed the mortified nun.

Without answering her, Hermine coolly proceeded,—"I consider myself as perfectly mistress of my own actions, of my own time, and at liberty to choose my own companions. Whilst I am a boarder here, I will never infringe on any just regulations, or disobey the general orders of the house. But if I remain in it, no one shall enter my apartment without my permission, no one shall follow my steps as a spy upon my words and actions. I expect the liberty of

selecting my associates, and being uninterrupted with them, at all times, consistent with decorum, and the established rules which good order renders necessary.

"On these terms, madam, I am willing to continue here until I am of age; and if permitted to make myself comfortable, I have no objection to adding ten louis d'ors yearly, to the sum you first demanded.—But I will ever preserve to myself the liberty of quitting this convent, whenever I can no longer feel comfort or pleasure in remaining in it."

"Well, my dear daughter," cried the abbess, whom the additional ten louis d'ors had prodigiously softened, "well, my child, I see nothing *very unreasonable* in your desires. But I cannot allow you to misconstrue the zeal and kindness of Sister Marie, whose affection for you introduced you to my consideration; and whose attentions

tions to you are solely owing to the very best motives, — gratitude for obligingness, is certainly a duty."

"Doubtless, madam," replied Hermine, "and whilst Sister Marie claims my gratitude by *obliging attentions*, I certainly shall not withhold it."

"Very well, very proper indeed,—but who are the companions you wish to select, daughter?"

"In the first place the young English Lady, Fidelia."—"But she is a novice, and there may be some impropriety and no less danger in an intimacy with her."

"Neither the one nor the other; I promise you that I shall never interfere with that destiny which seems to fix her for life in this house, if an act of her own choice, or proper from imperious necessity. She

is

is old enough to judge for herself—and my sentiments, whatever they may be, shall not tend to make her uneasy, or occasion to her any painful regrets for the past, or dread of the future."

"You express yourself very judiciously," answered the but half satisfied lady, "I believe, Sister Marie, we may have confidence in these principles." The sister bowed, she could not trust her voice, for passion and malice half choaked her, as she strove to repress their ebullition from bursting forth.

Hermine having gained her point, with a low curtsy withdrew, pleased with her success; but with encreased contempt and dislike for the selfish, mean abbess, and her still more contemptible confidant.

That very day Hermine resolved to avail herself of the permission she had obtained. When they met at the refectory, she addressed

dressed Fidelia, and invited her openly to her apartment. Surprise rendered her mute, she threw her eyes on Sister Marie, who was present.

"Will you not oblige me," added Hermine, "I am allowed by the Lady Abbess to invite a companion sometimes."

"Oh, yes, with the greatest pleasure," answered Fidelia, with sparkling eyes, "how good of the abbess to permit such an indulgence!"

"Well observed," said the scowling nun, "treasure it in your mind, and let your conduct and behaviour merit such uncommon goodness."

The meek Fidelia bowed with reverence to the nun, and followed Hermine to her apartment, not yet recovered from her first surprize. But the moment she entered,

entered, she burst into tears, and embracing her sympathising companion, exclaimed, "This is the first pleasurable moment I have known these three years!"

Hermine soothed and cheered her, and immediately to turn the current of her ideas, related the past scene with the abbess; concluding with the promise she had made respecting her young friend.

"Ah!" cried she, "you hazard nothing by that promise, my destiny is indeed irrevocably fixed—this is the only asylum ill fortune has left me.—And that you may know the poor unfortunate you design to notice, I will relate to you my simple story, tho' I have never disclosed it here."

"Stop, my sweet friend," said Hermine, "do not suppose I have any impertinent unjustifiable curiosity to pry into your affairs, or wish to give you the pain of relating

lating unpleasant events.—It is also proper that I should tell you that our confidence cannot be reciprocal. I can communicate neither my name, story, or future views to you;—restricted by commands ever dear and sacred, I am myself ignorant of what is to be my destiny, until I arrive at the age of one-and-twenty. It becomes not me, therefore, to investigate the story of other persons, when I must appear to be wrapt up in reserve, and affect a mystery relative to my own affairs."

"You are equally delicate and generous," replied Fidelia, "and I am more than ever inclined to relate the few events of my life; because I am persuaded you have candour equal to your generosity, and will neither despise nor reject the innocent victim of a too rigid observance of those laws, said to be imposed by the rules of society, and levelled against the peace and honour of unoffending, unfortunate beings like myself."

"Despise,

"Despise, reject!" repeated Hermine, "no, my heart already claims acquaintance with your's. You interested me from the moment I beheld you; and whatever may be the nature of your misfortunes, I am convinced neither blame nor reproach can be attached to you, so firmly are my sentiments rooted in your favour."

"Dear madam," returned Fidelia, "may you ever, as now, be justified to yourself for your generous and liberal prepossessions, the spontaneous effusions of a good heart; though allow me to say, so specious is deceit, so gilded is the snare that dances before the innocent, unsuspicious victim of duplicity, that even the virtues of the heart are rendered subservient to the purposes of vice. This sad truth my story will illustrate." Fidelia then began as follows.

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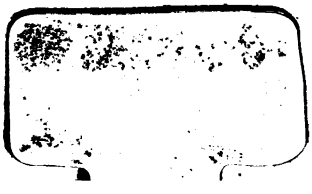
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